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Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8294th meeting
Tuesday, 26 June 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Nebenzia/Mr. Safronkov	(Russian Federation)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djédjé
	Equatorial Guinea	Mrs. Mele Colifa
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Duclos
	Poland	Mr. Lewicki
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. Tachco

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2018/539)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2018/539)

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Japan, Pakistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; and Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Gerton Van Den Akker, representative of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/539, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Yamamoto: Afghanistan is experiencing a politically dynamic period. Ten days ago, we witnessed an extraordinary series of events in Afghanistan that demonstrated both the possibilities for peace and the enduring structural obstacles. On 7 June, President Ghani declared a unilateral ceasefire for the period 12-19 June to commemorate the Eid festivities that conclude the month of Ramadan. Two days later, the Taliban announced its own unilateral ceasefire, covering 15-17 June. During these overlapping three days, both sides honoured their respective ceasefires for the first time in the past 17 years of conflict. Many Afghans reacted with jubilation. Local Government authorities invited members of the Taliban to lay down their arms and enter cities to visit their families; some Afghan soldiers visited Taliban-controlled areas. Social media was inundated with photos of Taliban fighters embracing Afghan security forces.

President Ghani then proposed to extend the ceasefire — a proposal endorsed by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and many members of the international community. The Taliban, unfortunately, recommitted themselves to battle. I regret deeply that the Taliban did not take up the opportunity to cease fighting and reduce violence. Their decision to fight will only increase the suffering of civilians.

It is nonetheless worth taking stock of how much has changed this year alone on the question of peace in Afghanistan. The National Unity Government's offer of peace talks without preconditions, made during the Kabul Process conference on 28 February, created a new reality. Even though the Taliban did not formally respond to the offer, a number of other developments reinforced it. First, we saw an unprecedented grass-roots movement. Beginning in March, ordinary Afghan people began setting up tents in around 20 of the 34 provinces, where they protested for peace. In early June, a group of 2,000 religious scholars met in Kabul. They pronounced suicide bombings to be against the teaching of Islam and called for a ceasefire and for peace talks to begin. At the beginning of Ramadan, one of the first groups to set up a peace tent began a 500-kilometre march from Helmand to Kabul, stopping along the way to raise support for their call for a ceasefire and talks and reaching Kabul last week. Their demand to end the conflict is addressed to every party to the conflict. The Afghan people's genuine demand for peace, coming from the bottom of their hearts, must not be ignored.

We should ask ourselves two questions. What have we learned from these events for peace and how do we respond? What we have learned is that both the Afghan Government and the Taliban have command and control over their troops. Afghans, including Taliban fighters, clearly want peace. It is also clear that President Ghani is taking courageous steps to seek peace through talks.

How do we respond? In returning to the battlefield, the Taliban insist that its goal is to end the presence

of foreign forces in Afghanistan. Therefore, it shuns direct talks with the Afghan Government. However, any future political settlement in Afghanistan must take into account the concerns of all Afghans. The Afghans must talk among themselves to end the conflict and to decide on the future. That clearly requires the Taliban to have direct talks with the Afghan Government. We believe that the issue of international forces will inevitably be taken up in the comprehensive context of peace talks, which will determine the future political order for all Afghans. I should like to note here that regional efforts to counter terrorism have been receiving more attention, with some important international conferences organized by Tajikistan and the Office of Counter-Terrorism.

Preparations are now under way in earnest for parliamentary elections in October and presidential elections planned for spring of next year. Since mid-April, over 7 million people have registered to vote. This is the first time since 2003 that Afghanistan is conducting a complete registration of voters for both parliamentary and presidential elections. The goal is a single, national voter registry that can produce accurate lists based on polling stations. When achieved, it is expected to significantly reduce fraud.

The registration of over 7 million voters is a positive achievement under difficult circumstances, particularly insecurity. On closer scrutiny, however, there remains cause for concern. First, in six provinces, less than 35 per cent of the estimated eligible voters were registered. Secondly, registration within provinces is uneven, with certain areas being prevented from registering for logistical or security reasons. Given Afghanistan's multi-ethnic composition, the exclusion of those communities could lead to the election results being contested. Such disparities have also affected the nomination of candidates.

This time, elections in Afghanistan are being conducted as a fully Afghan-led and-owned process. All Afghans share responsibility for transparent and inclusive elections. The Independent Election Commission has the primary responsibility. All Commissioners must become fully aware of the lofty responsibilities they shoulder for the future of Afghanistan — to strengthen the foundation of the democratic political process and to demonstrate that Afghanistan is determined and ready to take on the challenges to bring about an independent, sovereign State that can stand on its own feet.

Political parties and political leaders need to be fully aware that they also carry a large part of the responsibility for credible elections. Rather than simply criticizing the process, they must be actively engaged to make elections truly Afghan-owned.

We welcome the commitment of civil society to monitor voting, counting, tabulating, and transmission of results at every polling station. The international community must support their monitoring activities. The United Nations has 23 international experts currently working with the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission, as well as their respective secretariats, and additional technical advisers are being recruited. UNAMA will do all it can alongside the international community to assist Afghan efforts to bring about transparent, inclusive and credible Afghan-owned elections.

The ministerial conference on Afghanistan in Geneva, hosted by the United Nations and co-chaired by the Government of Afghanistan, will be held on 28 November. The conference comes at the mid-point of the transformation decade during which the country transitions from dependence on the international community to self-reliance. The conference will focus on three areas. The first is the extent to which the country is moving towards self-reliance and the effectiveness of aid. The second area is the remaining challenges, for example insecurity and job creation. Clearly, a safer country where the private sector can grow faster is key to creating employment. Finally, it will address the link between short-term humanitarian action and development cooperation. The link between peace and security, humanitarian action and development is a key theme for the United Nations, and the Geneva ministerial conference offers an opportunity to focus on that nexus.

In Geneva, we expect the Afghan side to report on its achievements in the areas of development, poverty reduction and reforms, and to outline concrete plans to address remaining challenges. In response, I count on Afghanistan's development partners to actively support the people and institutions of Afghanistan as they move the country forward. We are encouraged to see that the Afghan Government is already looking beyond the transformation decade, for example by working to increase regional connectivity and trade. Much has been achieved, but much remains to be done in the domains of peace, security and development. Geneva

affords us all this year's best chance to set in stone the road to a safer and better future.

Much of Afghanistan, in particular the north and the west, have been struck by drought more severe than anything experienced in almost a decade. Wheat production in 2017 was reported to be 57 per cent below the five-year average. The 2018 harvest is forecast to be even lower. The humanitarian response plan has been revised by the amount of $117 million up to the still modest total of $547 million in order to enable the United Nations to provide relief to affected populations and to complement the work of the Government to assist people in need.

While our attention has been focused on the larger political processes, it is important that we not lose sight of the critical issue of the protection of women's rights. UNAMA recently issued a report on the use of mediation to resolve criminal cases of violence against women. I was greatly disturbed by the findings. The report found that a majority of those cases were resolved through mediation instead of being tried in accordance with criminal laws. In many cases, such traditional means of resolution compounded the original violence. Women were left to suffer. Women who have been subjected to criminal violence must be able to assert their rights according to the law.

The key political events of peace and the elections are far from ensured. However, we are seeing unprecedented opportunities to make progress in seeking peace and in consolidating the political foundation for the future. Afghanistan's evolving development needs and the strategies to address them are being re-evaluated as part of the preparations for the Geneva conference. In other words, the coming months will present critical opportunities for the international community to seriously review and adjust the way in which it supports and assists Afghanistan in its efforts to bring about peace, democracy and self-reliance.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Fedotov.

Mr. Fedotov (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your successful presidency of the Security Council and on its convening of this very timely consideration of the issue of Afghanistan today in the Security Council. I also thank you for inviting me to this meeting.

(*spoke in English*)

When I last addressed the Security Council on the counter-narcotics challenges and responses in Afghanistan in December 2017 (see S/PV.8147), I highlighted the urgent need to step up international action. In half an hour, I will join the President of the General Assembly to launch the *World Drug Report 2018*, which is the flagship publication of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The findings of the report indicate that last year, the total global opium production increased by 65 per cent to the amount of 10,500 tons. That is the highest number recorded by UNODC since we started monitoring. Most of that opium originates in Afghanistan, where, as the Security Council is well aware, opium poppy cultivation and production have reached unprecedented levels.

That situation clearly has a high destabilizing potential for the country, the wider region and the international community. Last month, UNODC released a socioeconomic study that complements the annual *Afghanistan Opium Survey*. The study clearly underlines the multiple challenges to sustainable development, peace and security posed by opium. The linkages with terrorism and other forms of crime have also been widely acknowledged, including by the Council. Those problems require long-term engagement and solutions in order to achieve results.

Today, I am pleased to note that since December, we have seen some positive momentum with efforts to respond to that global threat. Nevertheless, many formidable challenges remain. Once again, I would like to highlight the importance of shared responsibility and international cooperation in addressing the many security, safety, development and health challenges posed by the situation. Unfortunately, the focus of the international community has shifted away from the priority of counter-narcotics in recent years. We cannot afford such inattention. Moreover, sustained resources are needed to address the situation.

In that context, UNODC has pursued efforts to advocate for renewed awareness and support and to strengthen regional and interregional dialogue and responses to opium trafficking. UNODC and the Afghan Ministry of Counter-Narcotics have worked together to reinvigorate the Afghan commitment to the issue, including in the broader context of the Kabul peacebuilding process. That includes UNODC support to the interministerial working group, led by

the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics, for the development of a counter-narcotics strategy with a strong regional cooperation component.

Furthermore, in close coordination with the Government of Afghanistan, UNODC has developed strategic actions to respond to the global threats of opiates in order to step up regional and interregional responses to counter the increases in opium cultivation and production and to address the related threats of crime, terrorism and corruption. Our efforts focus on four identified priorities: first, the need for a revitalized and strong Afghan lead in counter-narcotics action; secondly, the importance of comprehensive and balanced approaches, from the health sector to law enforcement, under the principle of shared responsibility and in line with the recommendations of the seventeenth special session of the General Assembly to consider the question of international cooperation against illicit production, supply, demand, trafficking and distribution of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances; thirdly, the need to target the nexus between drugs, crime and terrorism as a spoiler of the peace process; and, fourthly, the need to support Member States, especially in Central and West Asia, in strengthening mechanisms that contribute to preventing conflict and destabilization related to the opiate threat and the action of international terrorist groups based in the region and beyond. The strategy seeks to further enhance effective interagency coordination with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia.

For maximum effectiveness and efficiency, the strategy also aims to plug into existing coordination and governance mechanisms, such as the Paris Pact Initiative, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan, the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Afghan Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, among many others.

The recent Paris Pact Policy Consultative Group Meeting in Vienna noted the following strategic and policy developments. UNODC remains fully engaged in supporting Afghanistan and the neighbouring countries in pursuing comprehensive counter-narcotics action. That includes alternative development, regional and interregional cooperation to deal with the illicit trafficking of drugs and precursors, as well as to intercept the financial flows, law enforcement capacity-building, and the scaling up of drug-use prevention and treatment services.

Looking ahead, the Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, to be held in Geneva in November, represents an opportunity to highlight the importance of counter-narcotics responses. I hope that we can count on the assistance of the Security Council to draw attention to the many threats to Afghanistan, the wider region and beyond posed by opiates and to the need for urgent and determined international action.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Fedotov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Voronkov.

Mr. Voronkov: I would like to begin by thanking the Russian presidency of the Security Council and the members of the Council for this opportunity to speak about the challenges facing Afghanistan when it comes to preventing and countering terrorism.

Last month, when I briefed the Security Council on the outcomes of my mission to Iraq, together with Assistant Secretary-General Ms. Michèle Coninsx (see S/PV.8271), I started by expressing our solidarity with the victims of multiple terrorist attacks in many regions of the world, including in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, the deadly violence continues across Afghanistan. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), there were 5,675 security incidents between 15 February and 15 May. The use of improvised explosive devices caused 1,018 civilian casualties — 311 people were killed and 707 injured. Two heinous and cowardly terrorist attacks took place in Nangarhar on 16 and 17 June, which left at least 43 people dead and 45 injured, and there was a suicide bombing in Kabul on 11 June, which claimed lives of 17 people and injured at least 40. I would like to express my sincere condolences to the Government of Afghanistan. Such attacks target not only Government officials, Afghan police and security forces, but also civilians, causing the deaths of innocent people and instilling fear throughout the country.

Secretary-General António Guterres has made countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism the highest priorities on his agenda. In just two days, we will host in New York the first ever High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of

Member States. We hope the Conference will provide an opportunity for frank and candid discussions among counter-terrorism practitioners and boost international counter-terrorism cooperation. It is very important that civil society take part in the meeting. The international community has a solid foundation on which to build. The international legal framework, including counter-terrorism conventions and protocols, relevant Security Council resolutions and the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism strategy, which Member States are currently reviewing for the sixth time, all provide that foundation. I hope that final discussions on the review process will be successful and that we can approve the outcome document.

Nonetheless, having the framework is not enough. A stronger focus on implementation is needed. Afghanistan genuinely needs and continues to request legal technical assistance and capacity-building projects to strengthen its national criminal justice framework to combat terrorism. I am grateful for the information provided in that regard by the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED). Acting on behalf of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, the Executive Directorate visited Afghanistan in early 2017 to monitor its implementation of resolutions 1373 (2001), 1624 (2005) and 2178 (2014) and identify its related technical assistance needs.

In October 2017, the Counter-Terrorism Committee approved the mission report, which identifies 24 priority areas where Afghanistan would benefit from receiving technical assistance, including with regard to legal matters, international cooperation, countering the financing of terrorism, law enforcement and border security and countering radicalization and incitement to commit terrorist acts. To support Afghanistan's implementation efforts, the Counter-Terrorism Committee held an informal meeting on 28 November 2017 to discuss the challenges, focusing in particular on the 24 priority needs. On behalf of the Office of Counter-Terrorism, I participated in the meeting, together with the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan, a representative of Afghanistan's National Security Council, UNAMA, other relevant entities and INTERPOL.

The Office of Counter-Terrorism has been working in collaboration with the Government of Afghanistan on how it can best support Afghanistan's needs in the areas of countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism, both at national and regional levels, based on the CTED's priority recommendations. In May, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, located in Ashgabat, launched the third phase of the Joint Plan of Action for the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, entitled "Towards a Comprehensive Implementation of United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia". The new initiative sheds light on the emerging challenges faced by the region, including the spillover of the conflict from Afghanistan. I am delighted that Afghanistan has actively collaborated with the United Nations both on the development and the implementation of the Plan.

I hope that Afghan counterparts will participate in the upcoming United Nations training sessions on border security, countering the use of the Internet for propaganda and recruitment purposes by terrorists and tackling drug trafficking as a means to finance terrorism, organized under the umbrella of the Joint Plan of Action. It is clear that terrorism has a very real and direct impact on the enjoyment of human rights. Counter-terrorism efforts should be based on respect for human rights and the rule of law. The Office of Counter-Terrorism stands ready to provide capacity-building in that regard.

Allow me to express my strong support for all Afghan victims and survivors of terrorism and praise the resilience of the Afghan people. The leadership of Afghanistan helped to establish the International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism on 21 August through General Assembly resolution 72/165. The Office of Counter-Terrorism has recently launched a Victims of Terrorism programme that will demonstrate solidarity with victims, raise awareness on their needs and work towards the fulfilment of their rights through practical activities, such as building the capacity of victims to put forward counter-narratives to those of violent extremists; strengthening mechanisms to provide practical resources to victims, through the United Nations Victims of Terrorism Support Portal; and building the capacity of victims associations and Member States to better support and assist the victims of terrorism.

The Office of Counter-Terrorism will continue working closely with Afghanistan and other Member States to support the victims of terrorism, including by producing a documentary on Afghanistan in our Victims of Terrorism documentary series project, implemented by the Office, in collaboration with the Department

of Public Information. To further raise awareness on the issue of victims of terrorism, I would like to invite representatives to an event on the sidelines of the High-Level Conference, entitled "Standing in Solidarity for the Rights of Victims of Terrorism", and organized by the Office of Counter-Terrorism, which will be held today in conference room 1 at 6:15 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Voronkov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr.Saikal (Afghanistan): I would like to begin by congratulating the Russian Federation on its presidency of the Security Council for the month of June and for organizing today's debate. I would like to express our appreciation for the delegation's flexibility in adjusting the date of the debate at our request. Also, we wish the Russian Federation all the best for the World Cup.

I welcome the presence of my good friends, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto, Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov and Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Yury Fedotov. We thank them for their briefings.

Since the last meeting of the Council on Afghanistan (S/PV.8199), we experienced a mix of apprehension and hope. The Taliban's so-called spring offensive caused still more deaths and injuries throughout the country, but their attacks faced prompt and at times pre-emptive action from our national security forces and hence were futile in achieving their objectives. In contrast, we reiterated our commitment to peace and to ending violence, offering the Taliban a historic chance to prove their willingness to choose a path away from conflict and destruction, with a key role being played by our Islamic clerics, peace marchers and international partners. We also witnessed notable developments in the regional context, particularly with respect to Afghanistan-Pakistan cooperation.

Further, international support for securing and safeguarding our country against violent attacks remains high. We completed the fourth-year review of our national security strategy at the NATO Ministerial Visit, where the security situation in Afghanistan and our reform measures were discussed. As a key outcome of the gathering, NATO partners renewed commitments to helping fund our security forces for the coming years with annual financial support. In this regard, we look forward to new pledges of support at the July NATO summit in Brussels and the potential contribution of other international partners.

In line with our unremitting commitment to the security of Afghanistan and the wider region, we have moved to double the size of our commando forces and strengthen our air force, which will enhance the overall capability of our national defence and security forces. Reforming our Defence and Interior Ministries also remains a priority; measures are already under way to bring a new generation of highly educated and capable officer corps in our defence and security institutions to leadership positions.

The Security Council is well aware of our firm desire for an end to the senseless violence that has been taking scores of innocent lives each and every day in our country. Earlier this month, the leadership of the National Unity Government took another bold and historic step to achieve lasting peace by announcing a unilateral ceasefire with the Taliban for the end of Ramadan and the Eid al-Fitr holiday. Our announcement responded to a call by a grand gathering of around 2,500 Islamic clerics from 34 provinces who met in Kabul and condemned acts of terror and violent extremism as contrary to Islamic tenets and principles. These developments complement our revitalized peace strategy, which was unveiled at the second Kabul Process Conference and reaffirmed in Tashkent later on.

The initiative once again demonstrated our willingness to make a difficult and selfless decision in favour of peace for our people. The ceasefire was mutually observed during the three days of Eid. At the expiration of this period, we extended it for an additional 10 days. Regrettably, the Taliban failed to reciprocate, and carried out terrorist attacks on a number of occasions. We thank the Council and all its members for joining our call to the Taliban to re-engage in the ceasefire and take part in peace talks without preconditions. We appreciate efforts from within our region and beyond in helping to create an environment conducive to a ceasefire during the religious holiday.

During the ceasefire, our security forces acted to defend our territorial integrity and continued operations against elements of foreign terrorist groups, including Da'esh and Al-Qaida, inter alia. They played a major role in the elimination of Mullah Fazlullah, head of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan terrorist group, which was

an important development that reaffirmed our long-standing policy of combating terrorist groups with equal measure and focus and without any distinction.

The success of the peace process will depend on a number of factors. We need to further strengthen our unity, continue to keep our people informed and involved at all stages of the process, ensure effective management of future ceasefires and potential negotiations, guarantee genuine implementation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, and work to further improve regional and global consensus on the international effort in Afghanistan. It is imperative that our zeal for peace be based on political, social and diplomatic efforts, coupled with security considerations whose only aim should be to strengthen our unity and stability. We must make sure that opportunities for peace are seized, not lost or turned into new challenges. That will only be possible by ensuring that the overall outcome conforms to the wishes and expectations of all Afghans, across the full spectrum of society.

To that end, ensuring transparency in all stages of the peace process and preventing any degree of misuse will remain important. It is also essential that peace efforts serve to complement and reinforce social cohesion and consensus on other national issues, including the consolidation of democracy, in particular through the forthcoming elections. Furthermore, preserving fundamental human rights, particularly of women, and ensuring justice for victims remain of paramount importance.

With regard to regional cooperation, a number of high-level reciprocal visits between Kabul and Islamabad have led to a new framework in the form of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity. The seven agreed principles cover a number of important areas, including counter-terrorism cooperation and Pakistan's support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, visited Kabul on 12 June, and important discussions were held with Afghan leadership, focusing on the sincere, effective and timely implementation of the Action Plan through concrete measures. Last week, a senior Afghan delegation visited Islamabad again in order to generate positive momentum on the Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity. The framework has the conceptual ingredients to shift dynamics towards greater trust, confidence and mutual cooperation, but an agreement is only as good as the will there is to implement it. And we, for our part, cannot overstate our commitment to its terms in letter and spirit and expect Pakistan to do the same.

In the broader context, we have expanded dialogue for greater cooperation with a number of countries, including those in our immediate region, as well as our Central Asian partners. The past three months have also witnessed developments that we hope will strengthen regional consensus in support of the joint strategy of Afghanistan and its international partners. To that end, we wish to reaffirm our overriding commitment to ensuring Afghanistan's centrality as a platform for cordiality and win-win cooperation for all. I repeat: to that end, we wish to reaffirm our overriding commitment to ensuring Afghanistan's centrality as a platform for cordiality and win-win cooperation for all.

Earlier this month, President Ghani attended the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Qingdao, China. Together with SCO member and observer States, we reiterated our position that expanding regional connectivity and overcoming the nexus of transnational crime and terrorism are fundamental for stability and prosperity in the wider region. With the revitalized SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group, we look forward to increased cooperation with that important forum.

Four months from now, we are scheduled to hold our parliamentary and district council elections. Preparations are under way for these, along with presidential elections next year. So far more than 7.3 million citizens have registered to vote, demonstrating their firm conviction that democracy, pluralism, and the rule of law are the bedrock of our stable future. Our hope and expectation is to ensure that these elections are transparent, credible and inclusive, in accordance with our people's demands. We are pleased that a number of young talented figures have stepped up as candidates. To that end, reform measures are under way in the Independent Election Commission and the commission on electoral complaints. Moreover, a list of new nominees for the position of Chief of the secretariat of the Independent Election Commission was presented to the leadership for consideration and approval.

Ensuring security for the elections is another important priority, and I am pleased to inform the Council that comprehensive security arrangements

have been put in place for that purpose. As a final note on this issue, we reiterate that the successful completion of the electoral processes is of vital importance for our unity and political stability.

The next main international event on the political calendar concerns the Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, which will be co-chaired by Afghanistan and the United Nations in Geneva in November. We look forward to presenting the highlights of the progress made against key benchmarks from the Brussels Conference, based on our national peace and development framework. These include progress in the areas of governance, public-sector reform, local governance, economic growth, and promoting and protecting human rights. We look to international partners to recommit new support over the coming years for our stability and prosperity. We look forward to high-level participation from our regional and international partners. The Conference comes at an important time, when the level of regional and international consensus on Afghanistan, particularly on the imperative of peace, is at its highest point since 2001.

Looking ahead, we will remain focused on other pressing priorities, such as the looming effects of the drought, with the prospect of displacing half a million people. The situation warrants immediate international attention. I strongly call upon the international community to fully fund Afghanistan's Humanitarian Response Plan covering 2018-2021. We thank the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other United Nations agencies for their tireless efforts on the ground and call on the broader donor community to join the relief efforts.

By the same token, we will remain engaged in implementing our national strategy to address the lingering problem of narcotics in all its aspects. We hope to do so with a greater degree of collaboration with regional and international partners. This year, we continued to work on multiple fronts to combat this threat as a key priority in the work of the National Unity Government. This included eradication, law enforcement and alternative livelihood measures. In the first six months alone, our counter-narcotics police force carried out 1,688 operations nationwide, seizing more than 112,500 tons of illicit drugs and destroying a significant number of drug-processing laboratories.

We hope to witness more tangible progress in this effort, which will be possible only with greater cooperation among regional and international actors, including in curtailing driving factors such as the trafficking of precursors and reducing demand. We appreciate the support role of UNODC in this effort and thank the Executive Director for leading the agencies' work in Afghanistan.

We are looking to the future with a degree of optimism in the light of recent developments concerning our peace efforts, including the announcement of the ceasefire and a possible shift in regional dynamics in support of peace. Moreover, our progress towards economic integration in the wider region, through various mega economic and infrastructure projects, continues unabated on a positive trajectory. Institutional reforms will remain a key component of our strategy for the promotion of the rule of law and our stability. In the broader perspective, we believe that these gains can best be solidified in an atmosphere in which all partners work together, in unison and cooperation, for a strategic objective that is vital to us all.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I thank the three briefers for having shared their insightful analysis on the latest developments in Afghanistan. We were touched by the impressive pictures of the peace march that Special Representative Yamamoto just showed us.

We align ourselves with the European Union statement to be delivered later in the debate.

Last week my Minister for Foreign Affairs, Steph Blok, visited Afghanistan. The message he consistently heard from many Afghans was one of peace and reconciliation. One Afghan youth wisely told him:

"Blood cannot be washed away with blood".

These words coincided with powerful images of hope at the end of Ramadan, showing Afghans uniting for peace. I thank Mr. Yamamoto for sharing these pictures as well. Afghans celebrated the first peaceful Eid al-Fitr since 2001, and there were marches for peace throughout the country.

The Afghan people clearly want peace, not tomorrow but today. But their call for peace is still not heeded by all. Brutal and heinous attacks continue. The Taliban has not reciprocated the extension of the ceasefire by

the Government of Afghanistan. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province is still carrying out deplorable acts of terror. Yet there remains space for accelerated momentum and hope. That is what we as a Council need to rally behind, using all of our leverage, bilaterally and collectively.

In this context, I will touch on three points: first, the peace process; secondly, the elections; and, thirdly, the nexus between crime and terrorism.

My first point concerns our collective responsibility for an inclusive and Afghan-owned peace process, which is the only way in which true stability in Afghanistan can be realized. Our Minister for Foreign Affairs reassured President Ghani last week of our strong support for his courageous efforts in pushing the peace process forward.

Neighbouring countries should also shoulder their responsibility by actively contributing to the momentum, and we very much welcome the progress reported in this regard.

As the Council we continue to be united in our messaging, as we were in our statement to the press issued last week. Our unity is crucial.

The Taliban should accept the offer by the Afghan Government to engage in direct peace talks without any preconditions. All parties should respect international humanitarian law and put the protection of civilians first.

We commend the comprehensive, integrated approach just described by Mr. Yamamoto of combining peace, security and development in policies. Nationally the Kingdom of the Netherlands is ready to do its part as well in an integrated manner. Our bilateral development cooperation with Afghanistan continues, and our Government decided last week to substantially increase its support for Afghanistan with additional military and police advisers in the Resolute Support Mission. We will also extend the mandate of the whole contingent until the end of 2021. And, of course, we support the election process.

That brings me to my second point: progress in preparing the elections. It is important that the Council pronounce itself on this. The first phase of registration has been concluded successfully, which is very encouraging. At the same time, the Afghan Government and the Independent Election Commission will need to step up their efforts. Reforms and preparations need to stay on track. The credibility of the Independent Election Commission in this is key. Trust in the Commission in large part will determine the trust of the Afghan people in the results of the election, and any issues arising in that regard need to be dealt with transparently, swiftly and effectively.

Furthermore, women's participation in the elections, as voters and as candidates, is crucial. Political and decision-making processes are incomplete without the involvement of women. That was the message we heard from the civil society briefers during the previous debate on Afghanistan in March (see S/PV.8199). We also heard it during the Council's visit to Afghanistan in January.

Young people have a crucial role in building a culture of peace. That was reaffirmed by resolution 2419 (2018), adopted this month, on youth, peace and security. Investing in Afghan youth will bring stability to the country. We are pleased with the election in Afghanistan last week of the first ever Afghan Youth Representative to the United Nations. My Minister was a proud member of the jury, together with Mr. Yamamoto.

My third point concerns the nexus between organized crime and terrorism. Terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province and Al-Qaida remain active. They undermine State security, stability and development, and often conditions for organized crime and violent extremism converge. The Government of Afghanistan, in our view, should continue to address the nexus between these two phenomena, for example by strengthening capacities, including border control. In general, we believe that the nexus between organized crime and terrorism is an important topic for the Council.

In conclusion, the Afghan people need a workable peace deal. That will require political courage, perseverance and the continued unity of the Council. Galvanizing the momentum of the Afghan-owned peace process is our collective responsibility. We should remain clear in our joint message on the importance of credible elections with strong participation of women.

Finally, I want to thank the Special Representative and his team for their tremendous efforts in assisting Afghanistan in often difficult circumstances. They deserve our full support. The Afghan people should be able to count on the Council. Let the Council answer the call for peace, as expressed in the impressive Afghan

peace march, and let the Council be a beacon of hope for the people of Afghanistan.

Mr. Duclos (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the convening of this morning's meeting and the briefings of Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Mr. Vladimir Voronkov and Mr. Yury Fedotov, as well as the statement of the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Mr. Mahmoud Saikal.

Peru notes with concern the security situation that Afghanistan continues to face. We strongly condemn the suicide attacks perpetrated by Da'esh and Taliban groups, which have serious consequences for civilians and the stability of the country even as preparations for a major electoral process are under way. Faced with those repugnant attempts to undermine democracy, we want to pay tribute to the courage of the Afghan people and the endeavours of their authorities, who are pursuing the voter registration process and other work in preparation for the parliamentary elections and district elections scheduled for 20 October.

We also want to associate ourselves with the call of Secretary-General António Guterres on the various political groups to speak and act as one on the need to tackle those threats and, on that basis, on the governance and reconciliation of the country. The objective of sustainable peace ought to spur all actors to pursue that course of action. We must deplore the refusal of the Taliban to extend the ceasefire as proposed by the Afghan Government at the end of the Eid al-Fitr holiday. That refusal stands in contrast to the mass mobilization of the Afghan people in the so-called march for peace, held during Ramadan, to express their support for a lasting ceasefire.

Peru reiterates its support for the Kabul process, designed and led by the Afghans themselves. We are convinced that intra-Afghan dialogue, supported by the countries of the region, is the only viable path to sustainable peace.

We would like to underscore the Afghan Government's commitment to increasing the number of women in the public sector, as well as the importance of compliance with the national strategy and action plan for the elimination of violence against women, and the concurrent efforts of the Independent Human Rights Commission.

However, we must express our concern about the situation described by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights after his visit in May. In particular, we are concerned about the increase in the number of children recruited by the different factions of the conflict, who often fall victim to sexual violence. There is a need for immediate action by the Government to counter that practice, as well as to provide for the rehabilitation of victims.

We also consider the fight against corruption and illicit drug trafficking to be a priority. Mr. Fedotov reported record figures for the opium harvest in 2018. That is a business that undermines the framework of institutions and encourages terrorism. We welcome the efforts that are being developed on a joint basis to reverse this situation. Allow me to recall that the Council is committed to supporting the efforts of the Afghan Government in its fight against those scourges. We would like to express our regret to and solidarity with the relatives of the recently assassinated counter-narcotics police officer who was recently murdered for courageously confronting that type of organized crime, as well as those of other officials.

In conclusion, we associate ourselves with the Secretary-General's call for humanitarian assistance to be provided, through the donation of the necessary funds, to the more than 2 million people whose situation has been aggravated by the drought affecting that country.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto, Executive Director Fedotov; and Under-Secretary-General Voronkov for their briefings. China listened attentively to the statement by the representative of Afghanistan.

Peace and stability in Afghanistan have a direct bearing on the well-being of the Afghan people, as well as on security, stability, development and prosperity in the region. The Afghan parliamentary and district council elections will be held during the year and preparations are under way. The recent terrorist attacks caused a large number of civilian casualties and the political and security situation in Afghanistan remains severe.

China welcomes President Ghani's recent unilateral declaration of a temporary ceasefire with the Taliban and appreciates the Afghan Government's efforts to maintain national stability and promote national reconciliation and economic development. The

international community should continue to provide strong support for Afghanistan.

Peace and stability are the foundation for Afghanistan's national reconstruction and economic development. The international community should continue to support the capacity-building efforts of the Afghan National Security Forces, strengthen Afghanistan's self-defence capacities and work together to effectively address such threats as terrorism, transnational crime and drug trafficking. At the same time, regional efforts should be made to help Afghanistan meet those challenges. The international community should strengthen coordination and cooperation in combating regional forces of terrorism. Strengthening governance is an important guarantee for promoting peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan.

Afghan affairs should ultimately be determined by the Afghan people. All political parties in the country should strengthen unity and resolve differences through dialogue and consultation. The international community must earnestly respect the Afghan people's right to independently choose their political system and path to development. In accordance with Afghanistan's national development strategy and specific needs, it should help the Afghan Government improve its governance capacity in a targeted manner. Advancing national reconciliation is essential to resolving the question of Afghanistan. We should firmly support an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process, including supporting the role that the Kabul process continues to play. We support the Afghan Government in reaching an agreement on national reconciliation with armed opposition groups, including the Taliban, and launching the peace process. The Taliban should actively respond to the peace initiative of the Afghan Government and commit to lasting peace and stability in the country.

As a historically friendly neighbour of Afghanistan, China has always supported the country in achieving peace, security, stability and development as soon as possible. Subsequent to the first Foreign Ministers' dialogue with Afghanistan and Pakistan hosted by China last December, China hosted in Beijing in May a Deputy Foreign Minister-level strategic dialogue among China, Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as a Deputy Foreign Minister-level counter-terrorism security consultation among those three countries and a Deputy Foreign Minister-level meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)-Afghanistan Contact Group. President Ghani, as Head of an observer nation, attended the eighteenth meeting of the Council of Heads of SCO member States in Qingdao, China, in early June. All of the activities I just mentioned achieved positive results in promoting a political settlement of the Afghanistan issue, while strengthening regional cooperation and advancing counter-terrorism efforts. China is ready to continue to use the mechanisms I just referred to in order to strengthen cooperation with Afghanistan and other countries in the region to jointly address the threat of terrorism and promote regional peace, stability and development.

Afghanistan is an important country within the Belt and Road Initiative. Security Council resolutions have pointed out time and again that all parties should take advantage of the Initiative to promote economic development in Afghanistan and regional cooperation, in that regard, so as to help Afghanistan achieve stability and prosperity and, through dialogue and cooperation, make concerted efforts to create a community with a shared future for humankind. In accordance with the provisions set out in the relevant Security Council resolutions, China will continue to work with all other parties to help the country leverage its comprehensive and comparative advantages, participate in regional economic cooperation and connectivity and achieve economic and social development.

In conclusion, I would like to commend the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and voice support for the positive role that UNAMA has played in helping Afghanistan promote the political process, safeguard national security, foster economic development and enhance its governance capacity. China will continue to support UNAMA and Special Representative Yamamoto in their work.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, let me thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his very enlightening briefing, especially on peace efforts and the electoral process. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Voronkov and Executive Director Fedotov for their briefings on combating terrorism and drug trafficking in Afghanistan, where the conflict is tragically illustrative of the persistent combination of local and global factors, whether relating to terrorism, drug trafficking, negative climactic developments or non-respect for basic rights, in particular those of children and women.

France associates itself with the statement to be delivered shortly by the observer of the European Union.

I will comment on four areas today.

My first observation concerns the security situation in Afghanistan, which continues to be extremely unstable and calls for pursuing efforts to protect civilians. France condemns in the strongest terms the two suicide bombings perpetrated on 16 and 17 June by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province in the province of Nangarhar. That type of asymmetrical attack — whether carried out by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province or the Taliban — has become the leading cause of civilian deaths, as the Secretary-General pointed out in his quarterly report (S/2018/539). In that regard, more must be done to protect women and children, who are especially vulnerable should there be a resurgence of violence. Almost one in three victims in Afghanistan last year was a child. The implementation of the national action plan deserves praise, but much remains to be done — for example, concerning the detention of children, their recruitment by parties to the conflict and the police force, and early or forced marriages. France reiterates its full support for the Afghan Government in its struggle against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province and the Taliban insurgency. In particular, we must see to it that foreign terrorist fighters fleeing Iraq and the Syria are prevented from finding refuge in Afghanistan.

France remains very concerned about drug trafficking, which continues to fuel the illicit economy, finance the Taliban insurgency and terrorist groups, and threaten the health of many Afghans. As Mr. Fedotov just underscored, recent developments give cause for concern, with an unprecedented level of opium production since last year. France calls on the Afghan authorities to redouble their efforts in that area, with the support of the international community and the United Nations. We hope that this subject, which is crucial to the future of the country, will be brought up at the ministerial conference on Afghanistan to be held in Geneva in November. In that regard, the Paris Pact Initiative remains an optimal framework for sharing ideas among all countries affected by drug trafficking in Afghanistan.

My second point concerns the fact that the dire security situation and the human cost of the conflict must motivate us to redouble efforts to achieve lasting peace in Afghanistan. We have seen encouraging signs over recent weeks. The ceasefires, which were honoured during Eid Al-Fitr, at the Afghan Government's initiative, have given hope to the Afghan people, who have begun their march towards peace. France welcomes the unilateral extension of the ceasefire by Afghan forces but regrets that the Taliban did not respond positively to President Ghani's offer to extend the ceasefire beyond Eid Al-Fitr. In that regard France highlights the importance of the Kabul process for peace and security and calls on the Taliban to engage in direct negotiations as President Ghani has proposed. At the same time, we recall the demand of the international community that the Taliban renounce all forms of violence. Lastly, the improvement in the regional dynamic must be commended and encouraged.

With regard to the electoral process — this being my third point — France welcomes the preparatory efforts of the Afghan Independent Election Commission. As of today, nearly 7 million registrations have been recorded on the electoral lists — an encouraging, albeit inadequate, number. We call on the Afghan Government to pursue those efforts, with the support of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and its international partners, to conduct free, credible and transparent elections according to the agreed timeline. The Independent Election Commission must continue to work towards ensuring the largest voter turn-out among the population. In that regard, we are concerned about the dearth of candidates in some provinces. It is also important to recall that women can fully participate in the electoral process both as voters and as candidates. In order to sustainably improve women's political participation, support — including financial support — for the national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, is needed today.

Lastly, my fourth remark concerns indispensable international support for Afghanistan. By renewing UNAMA's mandate in March, the Council reiterated its unwavering commitment to restoring peace in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, I welcome the exceptional dedication of UNAMA's personnel, who work with courage and perseverance in particularly difficult conditions.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): At the outset, I would like to thank the Russian presidency for convening this important debate on the situation in Afghanistan

and express my gratitude to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto, Under-Secretary-General Voronkov and Under-Secretary-General Fedotov for their comprehensive updates. We also appreciate the statement of our good friend Ambassador Saikal.

We would like to express our appreciation for the dedicated work of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto and the team of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, as well as that of other United Nations agencies, to bring peace and security to Afghanistan. The delegation of Kazakhstan, being committed to the stable development of Afghanistan as our neighbour, friend and partner, would like to highlight five key points today.

First, on the political-military dimension, we commend the Afghan Government's efforts on the political track to launch an intra-Afghan political dialogue to stabilize the situation, improve public administration, reform the legal sphere and prepare for the upcoming parliamentary elections in October. The elections should be fair, free, transparent, trustworthy and inclusive if they are to succeed, as preliminarily discussed this January during the Security Council mission to Kabul. To demonstrate our continued support for the Afghan Government in that regard, we believe that a Security Council press statement would be quite timely. We also welcome the second meeting of the Kabul process for peace and security cooperation as an Afghan-led and -owned peace effort, as well as the adoption of the Kabul declaration. We also welcome the intensified Afghan-Pakistani talks on building peace, security and confidence between the two neighbours. We stress the need to continue providing diversified assistance to Afghanistan during the transformation period. My country has therefore provided $4 million to the Afghan National Army to train Afghan military specialists.

Secondly, on the security track, despite the effective measures taken by the international community and the Government, the security situation remains complicated. We express our hope that the brief ceasefire announced by the Afghan Government and the armed opposition during the holy month of Ramadan and the Eid Al-Fitr holiday, will be the first step towards national reconciliation.

Thirdly, on the counter-terrorism track, we must say that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Da'esh in Afghanistan remains combat-capable and continues to step up its presence in various provinces of the country. Increased terrorist activity in the north of Afghanistan, near its borders with Central Asian States, is of particular concern. In that regard, the effective implementation of the third phase of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia is important. Afghanistan must serve as a platform where the Security Council demonstrates its unity in the fight against this persistent scourge and collectively confronts it. We express our deep concern over the increase of drug production in Afghanistan, which is one of the main sources for terrorist financing. In that connection, we also welcome the outcomes of the high-level international conference on countering terrorism and violent extremism, held on 3 and 4 May in Dushanbe.

Fourthly, we fully support Special Representative Yamamoto's view that peace and security are closely connected with development and that we need to increase regional connectivity and economic cooperation in the wider region in order to achieve stability and prosperity in Afghanistan and its neighbourhood. In that context, we welcome the Tashkent international high-level conference on peace and development in Afghanistan, held in late March. The launch of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline project is also a welcome measure. That, along with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization road map to assist Afghanistan, corresponds to the common position in our part of the world to strengthen ties with Afghanistan as a potentially profitable economic partner.

In that connection, we see it as critically important to implement the three-pronged strategy for conflict prevention, which includes strengthening the security and development nexus and utilizing a regional whole-of-system approach based on the development strategy for the wider region. In that regard, we note the importance of regional cooperation as a means of ensuring the economic prosperity of Afghanistan and strengthening its security. We must involve regional countries in the development of trade, economic, transit/transport and humanitarian ties with Afghanistan by providing them with related grants for such purposes.

In addition, we believe that it is necessary to involve the United Nations in the development of a regional development strategy, including engaging all country offices of the Organization, in accordance with the priorities of the Governments of the region and

Afghanistan, while uniting and coordinating the efforts of all funds and programmes based on the Delivering as One principle. The main task is to integrate the region on development programmes for the Sustainable Development Goals through trade and economic integration and connectivity.

Fifthly, Kazakhstan attaches great importance to the empowerment of women and the development of education, as it does to strengthening the role of women and easing the plight of children in Afghanistan in order to ensure the country's stable and progressive development. In that regard, an official ceremony dedicated to the completion of Kazakhstan's assistance project in Afghanistan, through the mediation of the United Nations Development Programme, was held in April in Astana. The project was aimed at strengthening the economic independence of Afghan women and training Afghan citizens in Kazakhstan. Training was provided in needed fields for Afghanistan, such as public administration and health, with a special focus on maternal and child health.

In the light of the successful completion of Kazakhstan's public educational programme for Afghanistan, we proposed to prolong it with the help of other stakeholders. We suggested to our partners to consider continuing the programme in a trilateral format — to be comprised of Kazakhstan, Afghanistan and the corresponding sponsor.

In addition, next September in Astana, we are planning to organize an international conference entitled "Expanding Opportunities for Women in Afghanistan". The main goals of the conference are to assess the role and contribution of women to the peaceful development of Afghanistan and the issues related to empowering Afghan women in the socioeconomic and political spheres by increasing their participation in the public and private sectors. The conference will also provide an opportunity to share international experiences in the promotion of gender equality and to develop specific recommendations for empowering women in Afghanistan.

The Government of Kazakhstan made a contribution to UNICEF in 2018 for projects on reintegration, rehabilitation and providing access to education for children in Afghanistan.

In general, Kazakhstan will continue to assist Afghanistan in all areas in order to achieve peace and stability in that brother country. Cooperation between Afghanistan and Central Asian States could become a model of partnership for peace and development for other regions. We have great hope for the forthcoming ministerial conference on Afghanistan in Geneva, to be held on 25 November, and we look forward to a productive discussion on ensuring security and development in Afghanistan and the wider region.

Mrs. Mele Colifa (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to thank Mr. Yamamoto for his comprehensive and informative briefing on the situation in Afghanistan and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I also thank Mr. Yury Fedotov, Mr. Vladimir Voronkov and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Mr. Mahmoud Saikal, for their excellent statements.

Despite the ongoing efforts of the Afghan Government, which the Republic of Equatorial Guinea commends and supports, it is evident that the peace, security and, consequently, stability and prosperity for the people of Afghanistan seems like a pipe dream for those who, on a daily basis, suffer the catastrophic consequences of lethal attacks. The incessant attacks in public places and the indiscriminate use of improvised explosive devices by anti-Government elements and suicide bombers are nothing more than cowardly attacks on the vulnerable in society. Such attacks are highly disturbing. We therefore urge all parties to the conflict to take all possible measures to protect the civilian population, in particular women and children, in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law and the basic norms of human rights.

Likewise, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea is concerned about the ongoing increase in the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. In that regard, we welcome Mr. Yamamoto's remarks with regard to urging the Government to adopt the necessary measures to ensure referral and rehabilitation mechanisms for the victims.

The threat of terrorism and the drug problem are closely linked. Drugs continue to be an significant source of funding for terrorists in Afghanistan. Close cooperation between the Government and the relevant regional organizations is therefore necessary to combat the trafficking in such drugs, especially opium.

Bearing in mind that the elections constitute a crucial moment for the renewal of political trust and the forging of the desired stability in Afghanistan, the Government of Equatorial Guinea welcomes the

decision of the Independent Election Commission to set a date for the parliamentary and district council elections. It is vital that the Independent Election Commission and all the political parties concerned join forces so that transparent, inclusive and credible elections can be held on the scheduled date in the manner lawfully established by the country's national legislation. To that end, the United Nations must play an significant role in supporting the holding of free and fair elections. We commend UNAMA in particular for supporting the Afghan Government in ensuring that voter registration is completed in accordance with the agreed deadlines.

Like all the representatives who have spoken here today, we believe that the only effective way to ensure the long-term security and stability of Afghanistan is by means of a political process and broad and inclusive reconciliation that are Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. The international community must therefore continue to provide robust support to Afghanistan so that it can respond to the many political, economic and security challenges.

To conclude, we would once again like to reiterate our praise for all the efforts made by the Government of Afghanistan that are reflected in the report presented today (S/2018/539). We encourage it not to give up on developing a strategy based on open and inclusive negotiations so as to achieve stability for the Afghan people. Clearly, we once again underscore the commendable work of Mr. Yamamoto and of his entire team in supporting Afghan society, in promoting and monitoring the human rights situation, in furthering peace and reconciliation and in providing valuable assistance to the Government of Afghanistan.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): On 12 May, a small group of ordinary Afghan citizens began an extraordinary journey. They left their homes in Helmand province to begin a 600-kilometre march to Afghanistan's capital, Kabul. As they marched, their numbers increased and they were greeted by large crowds when they arrived in Kabul on 18 June. They brought with them a simple message. After 40 years of violence and conflict, the time for peace in Afghanistan has come. In the presence of Ambassador Saikal, I want to pay tribute to the incredible resolve and resilience of the Afghan people. The widespread support for the march was a demonstration of the strong desire for peace in Afghan, all the more after the brief but historic ceasefires that inspired it. However, while the past weeks have offered a much-needed glimpse of hope, we remain concerned about the security situation in Afghanistan.

The continued high number of civilian casualties, not least among children, and the attacks against humanitarian and development workers are unacceptable. International humanitarian law applies to all parties. There is no military solution to the conflict. The only viable option is an inclusive and Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process, leading to a politically negotiated settlement. We strongly welcome the unprecedented steps taken by the Afghan Government in the pursuit of peace. The Government's peace offer at the second Kabul process conference and its temporary unilateral ceasefire are commendable. We deeply regret that the Taliban has not extended its partial ceasefire. We call on the Taliban to respond to the plea for peace from the Afghan people and to engage in a dialogue with the Government to achieve that end.

A peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan is key to achieving development and prosperity in the broader region. That should be in everyone's interest. We urge all those with stakes and influence, especially the countries of the region, to act with full and unreserved commitment to engaging constructively in support of a political solution. Indeed, many challenges faced by Afghanistan are common to the countries of the region: security threats, radicalization, the production of, and trade in, narcotics — with all its negative effects, as highlighted by Executive Director Fedotov earlier this morning — climate change and conflicts over water and energy resources. Through regional cooperation, such challenges can be addressed and transformed into mutually beneficial opportunities.

Women's full and effective participation in peace processes and political, social and economic life is essential to creating legitimate systems that cater to the needs of the whole population. In addition, it is difficult to think of any other structural change that would more effectively reject what the Taliban stands for. I want to welcome the efforts that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan has made to that end, which we support. We encourage efforts to ensure women's full participation in the preparations and in the ministerial meeting in Geneva in November.

For our part, to that end and through our most recent contribution to the Afghan National Army trust fund, we support the establishment of the first Women's Police Town, which is aimed at enabling and furthering

women's participation in the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces.

It is imperative for Afghanistan's future and stability that the planned elections take place in 2018 and 2019 according to schedule and that they be conducted in an inclusive, credible and transparent manner. We urge all stakeholders to do their utmost to ensure increased women's participation in the elections. Recent targeted assaults on the electoral preparations are not only horrific attacks on civilians but also direct attacks on the efforts to build democracy. We support the proposal put forward by the representative of the Netherlands this morning that the Security Council stay engaged and make public statements in support of the electoral process moving forward.

At the NATO Summit in Brussels on 11 and 12 July, we will reaffirm our commitment to doing our part to strengthen and to enable a self-sufficient Afghan security sector that is able to provide the conditions necessary to increased security in Afghanistan. Combating terrorism, creating stability and building national capacity and strong institutions will require action to address the political and economic root causes of conflict and instability. Our commitment to Afghanistan remains firm. It includes $1 billion in bilateral development assistance from 2015 to 2024, humanitarian assistance, capacity-building and dialogue and mediation training, including for local female actors, as well as our military contribution to the NATO Resolute Support Mission.

With regard to the effect of the conflict on children, as stated by the representative of France, we welcome the Government's commitment to including concrete actions in the criminal code to protect children and prevent their recruitment, including the establishment of child protection units by the Ministry of the Interior in all provinces. However, because the recruitment and use of children remain prevalent, we strongly emphasize the importance of implementing the penal code, with a focus on accountability, including prosecutions.

Lastly, demonstrators in the march from Helmand to Kabul were between the ages of 17 and 70. Many Afghans' entire lives have been blighted by conflict. All parties must now respond to their call for peace and ensure that future generations of Afghan children can grow up without the shadow of war.

Mr. Djédjé (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Yamamoto, Mr. Fedotov and Mr. Voronkov for their excellent briefings.

My delegation remains concerned about the deteriorating security situation, marked by an increase in the number of indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population, resulting in the death of many people and leaving thousands injured. My country condemns the wave of violence and deadly attacks, which has plunged Afghanistan into mourning, and once again calls on the Security Council to pay greater attention to the security situation in the country. My delegation calls on the Taliban to grant the Afghan President's request to extend the ceasefire and implores it to be firmly committed to direct peace talks without conditions, within the framework of the Kabul process, to achieve a political settlement to the crisis and bring about sustainable peace.

An inclusive political process should lead to credible elections and remains the key to ending the crisis in Afghanistan. In that regard, my delegation welcomes the considerable progress made in the dialogue among Afghan political stakeholders, which helped to peaceably resolve the dispute between President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai and the former governor of Balkh province, Mr. Atta Mohammad Noor. My delegation is also pleased to note President Ghani's implementation of the peace agreement with the leader of Hezb-i-Islami, Mr. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, which has enabled Mr. Hekmatyar to return to Kabul after a 20-year absence, his supporters to be released and members of his movement to assume provincial governorships.

We encourage Afghan stakeholders to continue to engage in dialogue in order to meet their aspirations for peace and take ownership of their country through inclusive and peaceful elections. However, attacks on electoral infrastructure, the abduction of election workers and the intimidation and harassment of registered voters are acts that could disrupt the electoral process and that demand action from the Council. Furthermore, my country commends the Government on its efforts to provide Afghan women with the means to consolidate their place in society and to promote their participation in regional and international initiatives to bring about peace, while protecting their fundamental rights.

The humanitarian situation also remains a source of concern owing to the ongoing drought and low levels of rainfall, which could lead to famine in the country and to the forced displacement of people. According to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/539) of 6 June, more than 2 million people across two thirds of the country will be affected by drought and 1.4 million will be severely affected and require emergency food and water assistance in order to survive. My delegation deplores the very limited access of humanitarian agencies to vulnerable people and the attacks on humanitarian workers, which constitute a breach of international humanitarian law. We therefore call on the international community to respond to the emergency appeal launched by the United Nations aimed at meeting the basic needs of those affected by the drought. My country commends the Afghan Government, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and donor countries on their efforts to organize the ministerial conference on Afghanistan to be held in Geneva on 28 November.

The presence of Islamic State-affiliated terrorist groups in Afghanistan could destabilize the country and the entire region. Côte d'Ivoire reaffirms its support for the efforts of the Afghan authorities to combat terrorism and calls for enhanced regional and international cooperation in that area. My country welcomes the signing of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, which is an innovative partnership for regional cooperation in the areas of counter-terrorism, violence reduction, refugee repatriation and economic development. In addition, the international community should encourage greater coordination between the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Afghan Government in order to cut off the sources of funding for armed groups and terrorists in Afghanistan by providing alternative livelihoods to those living in rural areas who depend on poppy cultivation.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to reiterate its support for the efforts of the Afghan Government to bring about lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan, as well as its gratitude for the work conducted by the Special Representative to the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, through his good offices in the framework of the political dialogue. We encourage him to continue his efforts to restore lasting peace and stability to the country.

Mr. Lewicki (Poland): Let me start by conveying Poland's deepest sympathy following further senseless killing of innocent civilians in the recent attacks. It simply demonstrates the kind of enormous challenges that lie ahead on the path to lasting peace in Afghanistan.

I would like to thank all our briefers — Special Representative Yamamoto, Executive Director Fedotov and Under-Secretary-General Voronkov — for their insightful and thorough briefings. Let me also take this opportunity to pay tribute to the courageous and dedicated team of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for its daily efforts to advance peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Poland aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later today by the observer of the European Union.

Poland reiterates the significance of the peace process, which should be continued through constructive dialogue. In that regard, we recognize President Ghani's comprehensive and unprecedented proposal, which was made during the second Kabul process conference in February, as an important step forward. We hope that that offer will be given a chance and eventually lead to a genuine peace process. We count on the representatives of Taliban groups to respond positively to the offer of peace talks without conditions and to take part in an inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process.

Good governance and successful institution-building require adherence to rules and procedures that enable all citizens to participate in the democratic process. Poland welcomes the announcement of 20 October as the date on which parliamentary elections will be held. We regard as a key political commitment the holding of parliamentary elections in 2018 and presidential elections in 2019 in a transparent, inclusive and credible manner. We note that the process faces challenges at the outset, such as recruiting personnel for electoral bodies and providing security for polling stations. However, such challenges must be overcome by the authorities.

Poland hopes that the new Parliament will create a strong legislative foundation for the sustainable development and protection of human rights in the country. With regard to technical support, we encourage the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan to provide necessary assistance at the request of the Afghan authorities. Broad participation by women, both as candidates and voters, remans a high priority for us.

We see it as an important precondition for enhancing peace and security.

The development of a prosperous and peaceful future must be founded on wide and equal access to education for both boys and girls. Unfortunately, the report published this month by UNICEF, entitled *Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children: Afghanistan Country Study*, indicates that almost half of Afghan children are denied education — a very basic human right — due to a lack of security, poverty and discrimination. We think that the current situation needs to be addressed by the Afghan Government, with strong assistance provided by the international community and civil society organizations.

The security situation in the country continues to negatively impact civilians, particularly those who are most vulnerable, such as women and children. In that respect, I wish to echo the words of the representatives of France and Sweden to the effect that more needs to be done to protect those members of society, particularly children.

The continued violent acts of terrorist groups remind us of the fundamental importance of strengthening Afghanistan's institutions, specifically those tasked with ensuring the security and defence of the country and its people. Poland supports and encourages the Afghan Government to continue its efforts to improve the capability of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. Those undertakings require determination and engagement, which we will continue to support through training and advisory activities, within the framework of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission.

Finally, let me refer to the briefing of Special Representative Yamamoto, who said that there are currently unprecedented opportunities to make progress in seeking peace, and that it is up to the people and Government of Afghanistan to seize those opportunities and strengthen their resolve to achieve lasting peace and development. He also noted that it is up to us, the Security Council, and the international community to provide the Government and the people of Afghanistan with the necessary assistance in that regard.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the briefers: Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Vladimir Voronkov and Mr. Yury Fedotov. We underscore our appreciation for the efforts of UNAMA in supporting the Afghan people in such difficult circumstances.

We have read the Secretary-General's quarterly report (S/2018/539) on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security. We noted the information provided and the realistic assessment of the events in Afghanistan since the last report (S/2018/165). The current report, which covers the events of the last three months, is an amalgamation of positive and negative events. In that regard, I would like to touch upon the following main points.

First, on the political situation, we welcome the announcement by the Independent Election Commission of the upcoming parliamentary elections on 20 October. We commend the progress achieved in the preparations for the parliamentary elections, despite the destabilizing incidents that have occurred in certain provinces in Afghanistan since the announcement. The voter registration process began on 14 April, which is the first time that the country has registered voters since 2003.

My country's delegation noted that the voter-registration process forms part of a national campaign to organize electoral action in the country, which coincides with the distribution of smart identification cards and the naming of polling stations and the cities where voters will be able to vote in the upcoming elections. Moreover, the voter registry has been prepared and linked to polling stations. All such efforts prove that there is a true and genuine desire to achieve tangible progress in Afghanistan. We hope that such preparations will ensure that all Afghan people, men and women alike, are able to participate in the elections.

It is very clear that Afghanistan is going through a transitional critical period, and we would like to commend the people of Afghanistan for their resilience in the face of numerous challenges. We hope that the preparations for the upcoming elections will contribute to further action and consultation among the political parties and leaders of the country with regard to parliamentary coordination and the creation of political coalitions that reduce political tension. Prioritizing national interests over partisan ones is what we called for in the last meeting on this issue (see S/PV.8199). We reiterate that point once again, as national interests must come first.

Secondly, on security, we follow with concern the unstable security situation in Afghanistan, as the Afghan

Government still faces anti-Government forces, such as Taliban and the so called Da'esh and other groups in many parts of the country. Suicidal bombings continue to claim the lives of innocent citizens, and we are also concerned by the breaches of security that occurred in Afghanistan from 15 February to 15 May, amounting to 5,675 incidents. That underscores the staggering task that the Afghan Government and international community are facing, with continuous terrorist attacks perpetrated by Taliban and Da'esh against innocent Afghan citizens and foreigners living in Afghanistan.

We recognize that the increased acts and threats of violence are simply desperate attempts from those who do not believe in democracy or human rights and are adverse to stability and security in the country. With such acts, those groups are trying to delay the upcoming October elections. We hope that the Afghan authorities will continue to thwart such attacks for the remaining period leading up to the elections.

Third, on the humanitarian situation, despite the fact that the number of displaced people has dropped to 65 per cent, we are still concerned about the remaining 75,000 displaced persons, due to armed conflicts this year. The report of the Secretary-General maintains that there are still many internally displaced persons, due to factors such as violence and drought in many provinces, forcing almost 500,000 people to leave their homes and seek other accommodation. My colleague, the representative of Afghanistan, touched upon that matter.

We have repeatedly stressed to the Council the important role of education in building nations. In that regard, Afghanistan can benefit from the education sector. We have followed with concern the findings of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict, which verified 11 incidents of attacks on schools. The unabating Taliban attacks on educational facilities led to the closure of many schools in Kunduz and Logar. Such terrorist threats and acts undermine the future of the country by intimidating children and scaring them away from schools. That is one of the battles that have to be won, as children are the future of Afghanistan and must be protected.

The Government of Afghanistan is making efforts to amend a number of laws on violence against women. We appreciate and commend such efforts. We believe that the Government should continue its efforts in that regard, as it will benefit the Afghan people.

In conclusion, we believe that lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region can be achieved only through an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned negotiated diplomatic settlement. We therefore urge all parties to participate constructively in the efforts to achieve peace through diplomacy in the interests and well-being of the Afghan people. The political, economic and security steps taken by the Government of Afghanistan towards regional connectivity with its neighbouring countries are extremely encouraging, and we urge it to continue on that path. We welcome the signing of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, and we look forward to further interregional cooperation.

Such diplomatic efforts should be accompanied with significant and real investment in the education sector. Investment in the education system, based on gender parity, is the real investment that will help to revive Afghanistan and build a brighter future by the country's educated sons and daughters.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We too would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2018/539) on the situation in Afghanistan and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We appreciate the briefings of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto, Vladimir Voronkov of the Office of Counter-Terrorism, and Yury Fedotov of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

Afghanistan still faces multiple and complex challenges to its security, stability and development. The people continue to pay a heavy price because of the instability and violence affecting the country, and, as the report of the Secretary-General makes evident, it is civilians, particularly women and children, who are the most vulnerable and face the bulk of the challenges.

According to the Secretary-General's report, the security situation has remained highly unstable in Afghanistan, with several mass-casualty incidents in urban areas. Suicide attacks have become the leading cause of civilian casualties. Once again, we take this opportunity to express our sympathy to and solidarity with the people and Government of Afghanistan for the loss of innocent lives, including those of women and children. We welcome the statement issued by the Security Council (SC/13386) condemning in the strongest terms the two heinous and cowardly terrorist attacks that took place in Nangarhar on 16 and 17 June,

which resulted in at least 43 deaths and 45 injuries. Those acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation.

We appreciate the proposal of President Ghani for direct negotiations with the Taliban, which has received broad and strong support from Afghans and the international community. We also note that the Afghan Government offered another temporary ceasefire during the holiday of Eid al-Fitr and called for an extension to the ceasefire, with no response from the Taliban.

The long-term security and stability of Afghanistan can be ensured only through a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation and political process. In that regard, the renewed call of the Afghan Government for unconditional peace talks with the Taliban and the outlining of a framework for peace that was presented at the Kabul process conference are encouraging and need meaningful support from all stakeholders, including UNAMA. We hope that the Taliban will respond positively to that call and engage in direct talks with the Government with a view to achieving a political settlement and restoring lasting peace and security in Afghanistan.

The support of regional and international stakeholders will be key to the success of the peace process, and we welcome the declaration adopted on 28 February reiterating the support of the international community for the Kabul process for an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process, and reaffirming its commitment to the necessary fight against terrorism in order to bring lasting peace, security, stability and prosperity to Afghanistan.

With regard to the political situation in the country, we take note of the peaceful settlement of the tension between the Presidential Palace and Jam'iyat-i Islami. We hope that the parties will redirect their efforts towards addressing the multiple challenges facing Afghanistan.

The holding of peaceful and democratic parliamentary and district council elections within the set time frame is indeed very important, and we note some of the progress made in preparation for the elections. Accelerating those efforts and building the confidence of the Afghan people in the electoral process through the involvement and participation of all the relevant stakeholders will be key to ensuring the timely and successful holding of the elections. As the Secretary-General's report notes, ensuring an inclusive and credible electoral process while a significant percentage of the population lives in parts of the country that are insecure, with limited State authority, remains a fundamental challenge. The peaceful conduct of elections at all stages is critical to enabling people to exercise their right to vote without fear or threat of insecurity. In that regard, we duly share the Secretary-General's concern about ongoing attempts to disrupt the electoral process through violent means, including tactics such as intimidation and the harassment of registered voters.

Without sustained and inclusive economic growth and development, the peace and security challenges faced by Afghanistan cannot be effectively addressed. That is why the National Unity Government needs the coordinated and comprehensive support of the international community to push forward its political reform and national development priorities, as envisaged in the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework. It is vital that the international community sustain its engagement and deliver on its various commitments in that regard.

Therefore, we further note the steps taken towards closer regional economic cooperation by the Afghanistan Government, including the Afghan segment of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India natural gas pipeline inauguration on 23 February, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, held in Istanbul on 19 April, and the Afghanistan and Pakistan finalization of an agreement on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, among others.

In all of those initiatives, the efforts of UNAMA in promoting and supporting peace talk initiatives and reconciliation, dialogue and support for social and economic development, with full respect for the country's sovereignty, as well as its leadership, remains very important. We therefore commend the active engagement of UNAMA with the Government and the people of Afghanistan, in line with its mandate.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation thanks Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General; Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under Secretary-General, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism; and Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

On behalf of my delegation, I wish to express our profound shock at the numerous deaths of civilians that have occurred since the beginning of this year, caused by the conflict in Afghanistan. Moreover, the complex and violent situation that is afflicting the country is occurring within the framework of preparations for inclusive parliamentary and district council elections, scheduled for 20 October. In that regard, Bolivia expresses its concern over the security incidents related to the elections, causing 86 deaths and 185 injuries, the majority women and children. We condemn the fact that around 75 per cent of those violent incidents have taken place in schools or mosques that are being used for electoral purposes.

We also categorically condemn the announcement on 25 April by the Taliban of its annual spring offensive, named the "Al-Khandaq", without having even considered the ceasefire offer made by the Government of Afghanistan within the framework of the second meeting of the Kabul process for peace and security, during which the President presented a proposal for peace talks with the Taliban without preconditions.

It is worth mentioning that, as part of that offer, the President promised that he would consider such issues as political inclusion, a ceasefire, a revision of the Constitution, the release of prisoners, the removal of leaders from sanctions lists and the reintegration of refugees and ex-combatants. However, ignoring the presidential proposal, the Taliban increased its terrorist activities against district administrative centres in April, using improvised explosive devices in attacks of a complex or suicidal nature. To date, such attacks have led to 311 deaths and 707 injuries, the majority civilians.

We also highlight the unilateral ceasefire announced by the Government on 7 June, and we regret that it was not accepted by the Taliban. We firmly condemn all violent actions by anti-Government elements against the Afghan electoral process, such as attacks on electoral facilities, the kidnapping of electoral personnel and the intimidation and harassment of registered voters. We categorically oppose the suicide attacks that were carried out at a national registration centre in Kabul on 22 April and at a voter registration centre in Khost province on 6 May. It is imperative that the Security Council urge all parties to respect the rights of the Afghan people so as to ensure that it is their sovereign decision that reshapes the history of the country.

As on other occasions, my delegation expresses its resounding rejection of the recruitment and use of children by anti-Government elements, as well as any act that endangers the life, integrity and dignity of a child. We are alarmed by the reference in the Secretary-General's report to the fact that the task force verified a case of sexual violence against a child. Such illegal situations and violations of international human rights law must be thoroughly investigated by national jurisdictional bodies to find the perpetrators so that they feel the full force of the law and are held accountable.

Bolivia expresses its support and reaffirms its commitment to the work being carried out by UNAMA in Afghanistan. We are optimistic about the results of the second meeting of the Kabul process on cooperation for peace and security, held on 28 February. The meeting enjoyed the participation of 26 countries, regional organizations and the United Nations, during which they reiterated their full support for the offer of the Government of Afghanistan to engage in direct talks with the Taliban and decided to strengthen regional and international cooperation for peace, reconciliation and the fight against terrorism.

Similarly, with regard to the peace process in Afghanistan, we welcome the fact that the process was reaffirmed at the conference held in Tashkent on 27 March, with the participation of high-level representatives of 23 countries, the European Union and the United Nations. The support of the international community is essential to Afghans finalizing a peace process. On the list of priorities, my delegation wishes to express its full backing for the support provided by UNAMA to the Afghan Government and donors in the preparations for the Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, organized by the United Nations and the Afghan Government, to be held on 28 November in Geneva. We believe that those issues remain key for the conference programme, and the measures that the Government must take in the light of the conference are indispensable to the success of the event.

Furthermore, for my delegation, the fact that in recent months many families have been displaced and forced to move several times, without immediate prospects of a safe and dignified return to their homes, remains an situation that the Security Council must continue to prioritize. In that regard, we call on the countries of the region to reinforce their commitment to the exchange of information and documentation, which, conditions permitting, must guarantee displaced

persons a voluntary, informed, dignified, safe and permanent return to their places of origin and avoid any replication of conditions in which they must return to a situation of insecurity or to areas where they do not come from.

Finally, Bolivia stresses that there is no military solution to the situation in Afghanistan. We endorse any initiative for inclusive dialogue that respects the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, with the full participation of Afghan women in socioeconomic, political, peace and security processes, with their full protection from any act of violence, in full accordance with the national strategy and action plan on the elimination of violence against women.

Ms. Tachco (United States of America): I want to thank all three briefers for their presentations today. We commend the continued hard work of Special Representative Yamamoto on the ground in Afghanistan.

The United States welcomed President Ghani's announcement of an extension of the temporary ceasefire with the Taliban after the Eid al-Fitr holiday. That was a bold gesture. President Ghani's announcement showed the Government's commitment to peace as both a national and a religious responsibility. Once again, we see that President Ghani is making serious efforts to find a way to end the conflict. Sadly, the Taliban has refused to extend the ceasefire further. We condemn the Taliban's unwillingness to support that offer.

During Eid, we witnessed Afghan soldiers and police sitting with Taliban fighters side by side in prayer. If Afghans can pray together, their leaders can talk together and, ultimately, resolve their differences. The people of Afghanistan deserve a reprieve from the Taliban's campaign of violence — one that lasts longer than a weekend. We urge the Taliban to respond to the call for peace from the Afghan people, reciprocate the Government's ceasefire in full and enter into peace talks without preconditions.

The United States stands ready to work with the Afghan Government, the Taliban and the people of Afghanistan to reach a peace agreement that brings a permanent end to this war. It is also incumbent upon those parties that maintain close ties with the Taliban to use their influence to bring the group to the negotiating table. Those who provide the Taliban and other armed insurgents with weapons, money or political support are fuelling the conflict. That must stop.

As we continue to support the peace process, we have not lost sight of the critical work being done to prepare for Afghanistan's upcoming elections. The United States fully supports timely, credible and transparent parliamentary elections this year, with presidential elections in 2019. Preparations for those elections are at a critical stage, and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan plays an essential role in supporting Afghanistan's electoral commissions. We urge the United Nations to ensure that it remains fully staffed throughout the entire election cycle, in order to continue this vital support. We also appeal to all donors to make a concerted and generous effort in support of those elections, with a view to preventing further political instability that could frustrate efforts to advance the peace process. We have contributed tens of billions of dollars to Afghanistan, including hundreds of millions in support of Afghan elections. We would urge our international partners to do all they can to join us in that effort.

These remain difficult times in Afghanistan. The back-to-back terrorist attacks last week, which killed more than 40 people, show the challenges that the Afghan people continue to face. But despite those obstacles, the ceasefire during Eid gave us a small vision of how life in Afghanistan could change for the better. One Taliban fighter told a reporter that, during the ceasefire, "the people were very happy with the peace. Nothing comes of fighting. It is all loss." A police officer who was able to visit his family in a Taliban-controlled village for the first time in years recalled that "one of my cousins pinched me. He said, 'Is this you, or am I dreaming?'"

Those stories, and many others like them, show what is possible when the Afghan people come together in support of peace. The all-too-brief ceasefire during Eid should encourage all of us to think about what could be within reach. The ceasefire shows that peace is possible. The question is not if we can achieve peace, but how. We must redouble our work to help the Afghan people achieve a peace that can endure.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I thank the briefers, particularly Special Representative Yamamoto, for updating the Council on the latest report (S/2018/539) and for all of the work that he and his team are doing in challenging circumstances.

This feels like a moment of opportunity for Afghanistan. Recent events, including the unprecedented ceasefires and the preparations for upcoming elections, give us all reasons to be cautiously optimistic. We must do everything we can to make the most of this opportunity to end the violence. President Ghani's offer to the Taliban of talks without preconditions and the ceasefires over Eid al-Fitr are most welcome. The extraordinary images of soldiers and Taliban fighters embracing in the streets of cities across Afghanistan gave hope to millions of Afghans that an end to the conflict was achievable. The Afghan Government has shown an impressive commitment to peace. Now we need a similar commitment from the Taliban. The Taliban has to decide if it wants to be part of the future of Afghanistan. That seems to be what many of its fighters want. It is what the Afghan people want. It is time for the Taliban's leaders to show true courage and true leadership and to work for peace. Of course, the only solution to the conflict is an Afghan-led and -owned political process.

There are now four months to go until Afghanistan holds parliamentary elections in October. We welcome the progress so far on key electoral reforms and thank the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for supporting the Afghan Government in its preparations. Boris Johnson, the British Foreign Secretary, was in Kabul only yesterday, where he said that we encourage UNAMA to keep up the pressure on the Afghan Government and its electoral management bodies in order to ensure credible, inclusive and on-time elections. The United Kingdom and the wider donor community are also playing their part. We are encouraging the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission to deliver elections on time, with a focus on reducing the opportunities for fraud. We are particularly concerned about the fact that key positions in the Election Commission remain unfilled, and we call on the Afghan Government to appoint a new chief executive officer and provincial Complaints Commission commissioners without delay.

After the elections, the conference on Afghanistan to be held in Geneva in November will be an opportunity for donor countries and the Government of Afghanistan to take stock of the progress that has been made since 2016, and to ensure that the Government is on track to deliver on its reform commitments. It will also be an opportunity for the donor community and the Government to consider the future of international support beyond 2020.

At this moment of potential change, we should reflect on the progress that has been so far, particularly on the rights of women and girls. That is a personal priority for Britain's Foreign Secretary, who met with Afghan girls participating in a United Kingdom-funded sports education programme during his recent trip. Over the past six years, United Kingdom aid has helped 300,000 marginalized Afghan girls into education and trained more than 10,000 teachers. But there is some way to go to reach our goal of 12 years of quality education for all girls. The United Kingdom is contributing almost $1 billion in development funding in Afghanistan between 2016 and 2020. We will continue to work closely with our Afghan partners to promote opportunities for all Afghans.

I began by saying that this felt like a moment of opportunity for Afghanistan. There is a prospect of peace. Elections are coming that can help support peace and social stability. Let us stand beside our Afghan partners at this moment. Let us stand beside the Afghan people as they determine their own future.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Russian Federation.

We are grateful to today's briefers, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes, for their thorough analysis of the current state of affairs in Afghanistan. Their assessments confirm that the main barriers to stabilizing the situation in the country are the threats represented by terrorism and drugs. The conclusion to be drawn is that our fight against them must be uncompromising, and we must do it together.

The security situation in Afghanistan continues to be the most serious cause for concern. The Taliban controls a significant part of the country's territory. The insurgents' latest offensive raises serious questions about their willingness to begin peace negotiations. All of this once again convinces us of the damage that is done by relying on force to resolve the problem and on attempts to marginalize some regional stakeholders and bring in others. These kinds of balancing acts worsen

regional tensions and antagonize the very stakeholders who are capable of contributing to a settlement.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is a factor in this deteriorating situation. The group, which has as many as 10,000 fighters in its ranks, is already operating in at least nine of the 34 provinces, and increasingly often is organizing barbaric terrorist attacks with numerous terrorist casualties, including in Kabul, and continually consolidating its positions in northern Afghanistan, turning it into a springboard for further expansion into Central Asia. ISIL's establishment of camps for training militants, including fighters from Central Asian States, is particularly worrying. We must not keep silent about these facts.

Against this backdrop, we are again hearing accusations that Russia is supporting the Taliban. That is not new. This is something we have heard about frequently in the past few years, with practically identical wording every time and zero facts to back it up. We get the distinct impression that their true goal is to divert attention from the many real mistakes that have been made in Afghanistan over the past 17 years. One of the insurgents' sources of support is the military assistance supplied to Afghanistan by a number of our partners, which is provided without being properly accounted for and is frequently simply being stolen. We should point out that Western military experts have mentioned this too.

We have had no clear explanations of the unidentified helicopters transporting weapons and fighters for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) through Afghan airspace, which is completely controlled by our partners. The stubborn silence on this subject continues. Our demand that the situation be investigated without delay and this undisclosed practice cease still stands. We expect a proper report, not a form letter. And in general, we need to see more determined efforts from the Afghan authorities and the foreign contingents stationed there to clear the terrorists out of northern Afghanistan.

As Mr. Fedotov rightly pointed out today, the terrorist threat is inextricably tied to the drug problem. Afghan narcotics support the terrorists financially. In 2017, the acreage in the country under drug crops increased by 63 per cent and drug production doubled. All of this intensifies the drug threat both for Afghanistan and internationally. The situation clearly demands that we ramp up our collective efforts rapidly or risk letting this get out of control for good. We want to remind the Council that the Collective Security Treaty Organization — which has extensive experience in countering the drug threat, including through its Operation Kanal — is always ready to put its shoulder to the wheel in this area. At the same time, we believe that the Afghans themselves must play the decisive role. After all, it is the country's people who end up being the main victims of illegal business.

We welcome President Ghani's statement on the announcement and subsequent extension of the temporary ceasefire. It is important that these measures not be expanded to the international terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan, especially ISIL. We hope that the peace initiatives will give impetus to ending the fratricidal war in Afghanistan and to launching a peaceful dialogue and a process of national reconciliation. We strongly urge the Taliban to respond in kind.

We support the existing formats for national reconciliation in Afghanistan. However, we believe firmly that the principle of honest and equitable partnership, taking the interests of all the regional stakeholders into account, that forms the basis of the Moscow format and mechanism of the revived Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan Contact Group, is ideally suited to the task of launching the negotiation process. In that context, we note the Contact Group's successful holding on 28 May in Beijing of its second meeting, in which the participants unanimously affirmed their readiness to promote interaction within its framework based on the protocol defining the priority tasks and modalities for the mechanism's work.

Parliamentary elections, followed by a presidential election, are approaching in Afghanistan. We support holding them on schedule and take note of the authorities' statement regarding the successful completion of the voter registration procedure. In the circumstances, it is more important than ever to keep to a balanced internal political policy.

We cannot allow Afghan society to become ethnically polarized or permit any infringements on the rights of minorities. The elections should be inclusive and a powerful force for consolidation, bringing Afghanistan one step closer to attaining full political and economic independence and returning it to the path of sustainable development. It is obvious to us that ensuring broad regional and international cooperation

will help to achieve that goal. Russia is ready for constructive work.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): I would like to express our appreciation to Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the Office of Counter-Terrorism, for their comprehensive briefings, and to Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, for his statement. We also thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2018/539).

Addressing the challenges to establishing sustained peace, stability and security in Afghanistan remains a central issue. We were pleased that the temporary ceasefire in Afghanistan during Eid Al-Fitr was respected. It was unprecedented, and images from all over Afghanistan testified to the Afghan people's desire for peace. In addition, the civic peace-tent movement is another illustration of our Afghan brothers and sisters' demand for peace. We call once again for an end to the violence. Turkey continues to stand ready to contribute to Afghan-led and -owned peace and reconciliation efforts. Access to education for Afghan women and girls is critical to promoting a culture of peace in Afghanistan and plays a central role in Turkey's assistance efforts there.

We take note of the findings of the Secretary-General's report on the efforts to ensure an inclusive and credible electoral process in Afghanistan. Ensuring that the upcoming elections are held successfully will be important to part of our efforts to help Afghanistan achieve stability, security and prosperity. But the low and uneven voter-registration turnout in the provinces is worrying, and swift and effective measures should be taken to rectify the situation. The fragmented political environment in Afghanistan is another area of concern. We join the Secretary-General in his call to all Afghan political stakeholders to act in a spirit of unity and work together to ensure credible elections and advance the peace process.

Enhancing collaboration among the countries of the region continues to be crucial, which is why Turkey continues to contribute to regional cooperation efforts for Afghanistan. This year, in line with our continued support for the country, we are co-chairing the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process. During the meeting for senior officials of the Process held in Istanbul in April, participating countries highlighted the importance of reviewing the implementation of confidence-building measures.

We also want to note the successful finalization of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, and hope that its expeditious implementation through working groups will help both countries deal with their numerous challenges.

We cannot overemphasize the importance for Afghanistan of consolidating the achievements of the past 17 years, which requires sustained support on the part of the international community for President Ashraf Ghani and the Afghan Government and people. We commend the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for its efforts to assist the Government and the people of Afghanistan in their endeavours to achieve a stable, peaceful and prosperous country.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate Turkey's commitment to continuing to stand by the Afghan people in their quest for a better future for as long as our help is needed.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Biagini (Italy): At the outset, I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto, Executive Director Fedotov and Under-Secretary-General Voronkov for their comprehensive briefings.

Italy aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the European Union.

The events of the past few days and weeks have highlighted the fact that Afghanistan's security challenges remain extremely complex. International support, through the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, in which Italy participates and contributes as a Framework Nation, is therefore still essential. However, as many Council members have already noted in today's debate, we have recently been witnessing some truly encouraging developments. We welcome the courageous peace offer that President Ghani extended in February, as well as the announcement of a unilateral ceasefire for the last part of Ramadan and the

decision to extend it. For the first time since 2001, the ceasefire was also initially reciprocated by the Taliban. The political significance of these events is amplified by the unanimously positive reactions from both the Afghan population and the international community. In that regard, I would like to reiterate Italy's unqualified support for these initiatives, which we hope can serve as a catalyst for the peace and reconciliation process.

We encourage all actors and stakeholders to interpret these developments with the necessary caution but without losing sight of the hope for a peaceful future they have generated. This phase requires a heightened sense of responsibility from all sides, and we therefore urge the Taliban to react positively to President Ghani's peace offer. We have a window of opportunity that is manifest in the Afghan people's clear longing for sustainable peace, which can gain further momentum if all relevant regional and international actors work together constructively to remove the remaining obstacles to peace. Concrete cooperation among neighbours on confronting terrorism, drug trafficking and organized-crime networks remains essential. In that context, we welcome the bilateral dialogue between Kabul and Islamabad. Effective cooperation on issues of common interest can also help to significantly improve the prospects for peace.

Afghanistan is rapidly approaching a long election season, culminating in the presidential election scheduled to take place in 2019. The holding of free, fair, credible and inclusive parliamentary and district elections this October will be a crucial milestone for Afghanistan's democratic institutions, as well as in terms of delivering results for the Afghan people and will also be a tangible demonstration of the Government's commitment to reform in the run-up to the Geneva conference.

We appreciate the efforts that the Afghan Government and the relevant electoral institutions have made over the past few weeks to produce a noteworthy increase in voter registration, and it is encouraging that almost one third of those who have registered are women. In that context, I would like to reiterate the crucial importance of protecting and promoting women's rights. We encourage the Government to continue its efforts in that regard, since the gains made so far cannot be taken for granted, as shown in UNICEF's recent data on declining primary-school participation, while also taking into account the difficult security situation in many parts of the country.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our sincere appreciation for the important role and contribution that the Special Representative and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan provide in the framework of the international community's efforts to bring peace, stability and development to Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I would like to start where my Italian colleague just ended, by thanking Mr. Yamamoto for his work and his very comprehensive briefings. I fully endorse his assessments in the matter before us today. He has Germany's support for his work. Listening to the discussions this morning, I get the impression that there is a general convergence of opinions. In terms of the assessment, everybody here seems to share the view that, to summarize it, the glass is both half full and half empty.

With regard to the half-full part of the glass, the clear highlight of recent days and weeks has been the initiative taken by the President of Afghanistan and the Afghan Government to propose a ceasefire during the Eid festivities. This was a grass-roots movement, and the images circulated of people longing for peace were noteworthy. Another positive development is that the President continues to say that he is ready to engage in peace talks with the Taliban without preconditions. Also on the positive side, as many have highlighted, is the encouraging improvement in cooperation with Pakistan, and we welcome the finalization of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity. Now, of course, we need that dialogue to continue and be implemented so that it actually bears fruit.

Also, with regard to the glass half-full, the election registration process is very encouraging in some areas. Yes, it is a positive development that, as my Italian colleague just said, one third of registered voters are women, but our goal must be 50 per cent.

An example of the glass half-empty is the ruthless behaviour by the Taliban to stop this ceasefire. Like our American colleagues, we condemn this behaviour. We think it is very cynical and brutal behaviour by the Taliban. It must reconsider, so I hope that the Government will remain prepared to discuss this.

The two briefings we heard this morning were also more on the half-empty side. Mr. Fedotov gave an alarming account of the opium-production situation.

This is terrible, given everything that drug production has as a consequence. Mr. Voronkov also gave a very depressing account of the figures involved in terrorist attacks.

Also, on the elections, we have to ensure that all posts in the Independent Election Commission are filled, that everything is done to remedy the regional imbalances in voter registration and that the elections go ahead as planned.

I want to highlight, with respect to the glass half-empty, what Mr. Yamamoto said with regard to women and violence against women. This was highlighted by several representatives, including our French and British colleagues. More has to be done in that respect. I urge the Government to put this issue high on the agenda. The representative of Afghanistan said in his intervention that they are working on it, but I think that more has to be done to ensure the inclusion of women in the political process and address the issue of crime. This must not happen, so maybe the presidency in charge of the next debate could think about additional briefers. We have addressed the issues of terrorism and drugs, so maybe we could focus on the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, or children and armed conflict, and the Security Council could concentrate on these issues.

What we need, of course, is economic development and investment in the country. We need to create jobs so that there is an alternative to drugs. For this to work, there is one recipe: good governance. It is very important that the Afghan leadership and President and all involved work together as a team. We must continue to build institutions and an independent judiciary. We also must work very hard to end corruption, and we urge the Afghan Government once again to implement the recommendations contained in the recent report.

This, I think, is what needs to be done. The Afghan Government bears a great deal of responsibility. We are, of course, aware that it cannot shoulder this alone, but I think that it has to assume the corresponding responsibility.

Germany will continue to support the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the United Nations agencies working in Afghanistan. I do not have the figures on how much we spend, but we have from the very beginning had at least 1,000 soldiers there. We are in Mazar-e-Sharif with many other countries. We have for many years provided economic support totalling hundreds of millions of euros — billions, probably, by now — so we will continue to provide support in close cooperation with the Afghan Government and our international partners. When Germany comes into the Security Council next year, it will continue to pay special attention to Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Bonser (Canada) (*spoke in French*): Canada thanks the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for its ongoing work in the country. We also thank Special Representative Yamamoto, Executive Director Fedotov and Under-Secretary-General Voronkov for their very enlightening briefings.

Today I will address three main points: the empowerment and rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, the upcoming elections, and Canada's commitment to the peace and reconciliation process.

(*spoke in English*)

First and foremost, Canada is committed to advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls in Afghanistan. In May, Canada's Minister of Status of Women, Maryam Monsef, spoke via video at the fifth Afghan Women Symposium about our approach. I echo Minister Monsef in stating that Afghanistan has made considerable progress on gender equality. Canada welcomes the work of the Afghan Government to ensure the full implementation of the 2009 Elimination of Violence against Women Law.

Still, there is much work to be done to enable the full participation of women and girls in social and political affairs. Canada directly supports education, health-care and human rights programmes in Afghanistan. In all of these programmes we place primacy on ensuring that women's and girls' rights are advanced through them. For example, we have established more than 9,200 community-based schools in rural and remote areas of Afghanistan so as to increase girls' access to basic education. More than 80 per cent of the 273,000 students in those schools are girls. In Afghanistan, it is crucial that women and girls be included as equal participants in all decision-making processes.

This brings me to my second point: the need for fair and peaceful elections. Canada supports the meaningful inclusion of women as both candidates and voters in October's elections. However, we are deeply concerned by the security situation and the effect it has on the

ability of citizens to exercise their democratic rights. In many cases, election-related security incidents are occurring at schools and mosques used for voter registration. This is simply unacceptable.

The credibility of the elections process is dependent on the ability of voters and candidates, regardless of gender, to participate without being subjected to violence and harassment. We ask that all parties to this conflict respect the right of everyday citizens to participate in the election process. Canada supports the efforts of the Afghan Government and looks forward to democratic, transparent and peaceful elections in the coming months.

Finally, it is important to address the need for peace and reconciliation, and the inclusion of women in this process. I would particularly like to recognize Uzbekistan's efforts to promote peace through the Tashkent conference. Afghan-owned and Afghan-led efforts towards peace that are bolstered by regional support will benefit the stability and prosperity of us all. Canada also applauds President Ghani's courageous announcement on 16 June that the Afghan Government intends to extend its ceasefire. We support the Afghan Government's call to the Taliban to agree to another ceasefire and to join peace talks.

Canada supports Afghan-led efforts towards peace and regional stability. We commend Afghanistan and its partners for their work to increase gender equality, ensure fair and peaceful elections, and promote peace and reconciliation initiatives.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this debate on Afghanistan following the first ceasefire in the last 17 years. We welcomed this development and expressed our hope that this would lead to lasting peace. I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his informative briefing and tireless efforts at the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and I also thank Mr. Yury Fedotov and Mr. Vladimir Voronkov for their briefings.

Japan welcomes the steady implementation of the Secretary- General's strategic review, which was issued in August last year and endorsed by the Council in its resolution 2405 (2018). The strategic review's insightful findings provide a path forward for UNAMA to help create a future for Afghanistan where sufficient stability exists to allow for a focus on institution-building and development activities. Japan looks forward to actively taking part in the forthcoming Geneva ministerial conference on Afghanistan to be co-hosted by the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations, where we will discuss the strategy towards sustainable peace and self-reliance in the country.

The Government of Japan welcomed the recent announcement by President Ashraf Ghani regarding the ceasefire with the Taliban. Even if temporary, a cessation of hostilities is a positive step for peace. Long-standing instability and conflict have left Afghanistan unable to realize its full potential.

Japan, together with key stakeholders, took part in the second Kabul process meeting and the Tashkent conference, and expressed support for the Government of Afghanistan offering to the Taliban its plans for talks without preconditions.

Despite the recent ceasefire announcements, regrettably, we have not observed any concrete step toward such talks. The international community must keep urging both sides to extend their ceasefires for the sake of the Afghan people and to engage with each other on starting a more formal process.

Parliamentary and district council elections, to be held on 20 October, will be a critical test for the Government of Afghanistan. While we are aware of the ongoing preparation process by the Independent Election Commission and of strong support by UNAMA, there remain administrative and security challenges. The international community awaits the outcome of credible and inclusive elections, and we are ready to extend assistance. However, the most important thing is that elections must be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned. I appreciate the update provided today by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mr. Yamamoto, and ask him to keep us informed and to provide the international community with concrete suggestions as to how we can support the ultimate goal of inclusive elections.

Japan reiterates its commitment to assisting Afghanistan on its path toward a peaceful, stable and self-reliant future. The ceasefire offered a brief vision of what the future would look like. Achieving that vision is our goal, and we should not miss any opportunity to get there.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): Let me start by thanking the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/539) and Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto for his very insightful briefing this morning.

The Secretary-General's report notes that Afghanistan continues to face multiple political economic and security challenges in an uncertain and fraught environment in which the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. It also underscores the risks posed to the forthcoming elections by declining public confidence in a fragmented political landscape. But despite that bleak picture, this month has seen a ray of hope emerge for peace in the country. A three-day see a ceasefire between Afghan security forces and the Taliban on Eid al-Fitr resulted in an unprecedented pause in a war that has raged for almost 17 years. Even if the ceasefire lasted only a few days, it marked a moment of hope and opportunity. Eid saw extraordinary and moving scenes of reconciliation in some places between those who for years had fought a bloody war against each other. The comprehensive observance of the ceasefire by the Taliban also demonstrated that its leadership has control of the movement and is cohesive enough to negotiate a political settlement.

It is also significant that both President Ashraf Ghani and the United States Secretary of State have indicated that foreign forces can be a topic of negotiations in any talks with the Taliban. This could open the door for real dialogue.

My country has consistently advocated over the years that a negotiated settlement is the only viable solution to the decades of conflict and suffering in Afghanistan. We have therefore welcome President Ashraf Ghani's offer to talk to the Taliban without preconditions and the United States support for a negotiated settlement. The ceasefire earlier this month has demonstrated that negotiations are not only possible, but can actually produce a positive outcome. The opportunity that has opened up by recent developments must now be seized and translated into serious and sustained efforts to promote a political settlement and durable peace and stability in Afghanistan.

While the onus for seizing the moment rests on the parties directly involved in the Afghan conflict, Pakistan for its part will continue to do what it can to support all efforts to launch a credible peace process. My country's participation in all regional and international forums on peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan, including the Moscow format, is a reflection of our commitment and unflinching support for the peace process that brings all the parties together to work for a political settlement.

Pakistan can support any agreed format for negotiations that enables all directly engaged parties to talk to each other. We feel that the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, consisting of Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and the United States, remains a useful format to pursue a negotiated settlement. A Quadrilateral Coordination Group+ format can also be considered that brings all of Afghanistan's neighbours into the process.

A negotiated peace and national reconciliation are all the more vital to preventing the threat posed to Afghanistan, its neighbours and the global community by the presence of Da'esh and a conglomerate of terrorists, including the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and other groups that have adopted the umbrella of Da'esh. They need to be defeated decisively and urgently. We must not allow those groups to drive Afghanistan into another vortex of violence and instability, which would compound the threat to the region's stability.

Pakistan has extended all assistance at the political level, as well as through our robust counter-terrorism operations, to help promote peace and stability in Afghanistan. Pakistan's security is inextricably linked to peace and stability in Afghanistan. Pakistan has a vital interest in a peaceful, stable, united and prosperous Afghanistan. We stand ready to support Afghanistan in addressing the multiple challenges it faces, and in that spirit, Pakistan is engaged with the Afghan Government in a comprehensive manner in all political, economic and military spheres. A series of high-level visits by both our political and military leadership have taken place in recent months. Those exchanges have helped to create an environment of trust and inject a positive impetus in our bilateral relations.

The recently concluded Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity will provide a structured platform for engagement between our two countries. Its five working groups on political, economic, refugee, military and intelligence issues envision a abroad and sustained dialogue between our two nations. To strengthen defence cooperation,

Pakistan has offered support, including to equip Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, gratis training in Pakistan, as well as financing and supporting the construction of the border management infrastructure. For my country border management remains the highest priority, we are working with the Afghan Government on modalities to deploy military liaison officers on either side to coordinate counter-terrorism efforts and complement action against terrorist outfits on our side of the border. We must secure our border to prevent the cross-border movement of militants and terrorists. That can be achieved only through constant vigilance, effective management and real-time communications. Terrorists should not be allowed to provoke clashes between our border security forces.

Earlier this year, the ulema — our religious leaders in Pakistan — issued a religious edict, or fatwa, entitled "Message of peace from Pakistan", which unequivocally denounced terrorism and suicide bombings throughout the world. Religious leaders from my country also participated in the ulema conference that was held this past month in Indonesia, and we will participate in ulema conference of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation this coming month.

In conclusion, let me say that the international community has long been unanimous in its view that sustainable peace is achievable only through a negotiated end to this long-running war. Almost 17 years of the conflict waged by the world's most powerful military forces have not yielded a military solution. The path to peace in Afghanistan will be arduous, but it is achievable. As a first step, all the parties concerned must commit to a negotiated solution to the conflict, which offers the best chance to end the suffering of the Afghan people and restore peace to Afghanistan and stability to the region. We hope that the search for peace through a dialogue process will be the highest priority for the Afghan Government, the Taliban, the coalition forces, Afghanistan's neighbours and the international community.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Van Den Akker: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 member States. The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

First of all, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2018/539) and the strategic review. Our thanks also go to Special Representative Yamamoto, Mr. Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and Under-Secretary-General Voronkov for their respective briefings.

As stated previously on several occasions, the EU strongly acknowledges the crucial role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and all the relevant United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people, while encouraging peace and reconciliation, monitoring and promoting human rights and coordinating the international community's assistance. The EU wishes to have the closest possible relationship with UNAMA in a spirit of transparent and open cooperation on the ground and in international formats for the ultimate benefit of Afghanistan.

The EU supports President Ghani's peace offer to the Taliban extended at the February meeting of the Kabul process for peace and security. The recent historic ceasefires between the Afghan Government and the Taliban during Eid Al-Fitr have given the Afghan people much-needed respite from too many years of conflict. Popular support for that initiative was overwhelming. The gathering of Afghans from all sides — with Government officials, soldiers, members of the Taliban exchanging Eid Al-Fitr greetings and attending prayers together — has given a sense of what peace in Afghanistan could look like. The European Union commends both parties for honouring their commitments. President Ghani's decision to offer a 10-day extension of the ceasefire was another courageous step to make way for peace negotiations, and we call on the Taliban to reciprocate.

Meaningful and enduring peace in Afghanistan requires continuous and inclusive dialogue and engagement, and the EU is ready to support that process. In that light, the European Union supports the Kabul process for peace and security. High Representative of the European Union Mogherini, at the Tashkent conference on peace, security and regional development held on 28 March, offered EU support for peace negotiations and increased EU assistance for women's

empowerment, regional economic development and the reintegration of refugees and former fighters. The EU reiterates the importance of the Afghan Government and the Taliban moving towards a political settlement, which has to be Afghan-led and Afghan owned. Therefore, the Kabul process on peace and security should be the main international forum and vehicle to support such talks. Regional actors have an important role to play in facilitating the process.

The next ministerial conference on Afghanistan, to be held in late November in Geneva, will be an important opportunity to highlight linkages between a future reconciliation process and broader political, economic and social challenges. The conference will also take stock of the implementation of the Afghan Government's reform package committed to at the Brussels conference on Afghanistan in October 2016.

We support NATO-led Resolute Support Mission efforts to provide further training, advice and assistance to the Afghan security forces and institutions.

Respect for human rights and democratic elections continue to be a focus for the EU's dialogue with the Afghan authorities and the EU's actions in the country. Human rights form an integral part of the structured dialogue between the EU and Afghanistan under the Cooperation Agreement for Partnership and Development. In that context, the first meeting of the special working group on human rights, good governance and migration was held on 5 May in Kabul, during which we held a substantial and open discussion about a wide range of topics in the area of human rights and good governance. The discussions confirmed that Afghanistan has sound legislation in place in various areas, or is about to adopt such legislation in the near future. What is still lacking, however, is effective implementation. There is definitely room for improvement in many areas. During our dialogue, we identified some of the actions that need to be taken to ensure progress. Tangible measures against corruption demonstrating the political will to address the issue are of particular importance. Likewise, efforts to protect and further expand girls and women's rights and enhance their empowerment must continue.

The application of capital punishment remains a great concern for us, and the EU has underlined its principled opposition to any form of the death penalty. It has continued to call for an outright abolition of the death penalty in due course, beginning with an immediate moratorium as a first step. On the other hand, it is positive that the new Afghan penal code significantly limits the number of crimes to which the death penalty can be applied.

The upcoming parliamentary and district elections in October are of vital importance for the stability of Afghanistan. It is imperative that the elections take place according to schedule and in a credible, transparent and inclusive manner, in view of ensuring the credibility of Government reforms that will be presented at the ministerial conference in Geneva. The EU notes with some concern that actions remain to be taken to address delays in preparation for the elections and that there is a lack of outreach to the provinces and delays in setting up fully functional electoral institutions. All efforts must be deployed now to resolve those difficulties and make the holding of the elections possible within the announced time frame. The successful organization of the elections will be an important prelude to next year's presidential elections and can provide a firm foundation on which to begin preparations for that event. The EU and its States members remain committed to supporting the Afghan electoral process, and the EU has pledged €15.5 million to assist the parliamentary and district elections, together with other members of the international community under the coordination of UNAMA.

The EU and Afghanistan are continuing their comprehensive dialogue on migration. The latest discussion on the Afghanistan Joint Way Forward took place on 6 May, at which Afghanistan reiterated its commitment to the implementation of the Joint Way Forward and underlined the importance of dignified, safe and orderly returns and for special attention to be paid to vulnerable groups. That is something the EU and its States members agree upon, and we reiterated the fact that the implementation of the Joint Way Forward must be continued in a spirit of partnership, while taking into account each party's sensitivities.

At the same time, the regional dimension of migration remains high on the EU's agenda and is being addressed in the political dialogue, as well as through financial assistance. The EU has made a strong commitment to address the key challenges of irregular migration and forced displacement in Afghanistan, as well as in the region, and to work towards finding a comprehensive regional solution, while focusing on the root causes of migration and ensuring the sustainable reintegration of returned Afghan nationals

within the country. To that end, the EU has continued the implementation of the two regional programmes targeting migration and regional displacement in Asia.

From 1 January to 31 March, UNAMA recorded 2,258 civilian casualties in Afghanistan, reflecting a similarly high casualty toll as compared to the first three months of 2016 and 2017. The persistently high levels of violence and its corresponding impact on civilians remains a deep concern for the EU. It is extremely worrying that the proportion of women and children killed and injured remains high. We call on all parties to protect the civilian population, especially women and children. Conflict-related violence also destroys livelihoods, homes and property, displaces families and limits access to education, health and other services. We need to continue to protect the vital role of humanitarian agencies and respect their impartiality and the humanitarian space in addressing the most urgent needs of the most vulnerable.

In conclusion, it is important that the international community remain strongly committed to supporting Afghanistan in its pursuit of long-term peace, security and stability. The EU expects that the recent initiatives of President Ghani and of the Afghan Government will lead to the establishment of a genuine peace process. The EU continues to consider UNAMA a key partner in achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan. UNAMA has an invaluable role in ensuring the broadest possible international support for an Afghan-led and -owned process. The EU will continue to support those efforts with all the means at its disposal.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): Australia takes this opportunity to congratulate the Government of Afghanistan on President Ghani's 16 June decision to extend the unilateral ceasefire for the remainder of the holy month of Ramadan and for Eid Al-Fitr. The Afghan people overwhelmingly supported the cessation of hostilities, and the ceasefire has given hope that a lasting peace may be possible.

Australia has also welcomed President Ghani's invitation to the Taliban at the 28 February meeting of the Kabul process for peace and security cooperation to engage in negotiations without preconditions and without the threat of violence. President Ghani's offer and the ceasefire in June are bold steps that reflect the aspirations of the Afghan people. Australia underscores its disappointment that the Taliban thus far has chosen not to match President Ghani's bold thinking.

We deeply regret the continuing violence outlined in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/539) and the role of the Taliban and other insurgent groups in engaging in a series of heinous and cowardly attacks targeting Afghanistan's civilian population. We condemn the brutal attacks by insurgent groups and the actions of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) and ISIS-inspired groups, Al-Qaida, its affiliates and other terrorist groups in Afghanistan. Together with our allies and partners in the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, Australia remains committed to supporting the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces to meet the challenges presented by those groups.

Throughout the years of conflict, the Afghan people have demonstrated their steadfast commitment to building a better society in which the voices of all of its members can be heard. The parliamentary elections, now scheduled for October, will be another important step in that process. We are encouraged that, despite ongoing violence and intimidation, voter registration has been increasing. Conducting parliamentary elections in October will be crucial for political credibility. We encourage the Afghan Government to maintain its efforts to hold inclusive elections, and we welcome the commitment of the United Nations to supporting those elections.

We also look forward to further discussing the Afghan Government's plans for the upcoming November ministerial conference in Geneva to advance Afghanistan's economic and social prosperity.

In addition to its many other challenges, we note Afghanistan is facing a crisis, an imminent drought that could affect two thirds of the country. An estimated 1.4 million people are likely to need emergency food and nutrition assistance. Australia will continue to help respond to that challenge.

International efforts in Afghanistan are supported by a strong United Nations presence. Australia values the role that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, ably led by Special Representative Yamamoto, plays in guiding and coordinating international support in Afghanistan.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to thank the Russian presidency of the Security Council for organizing this meeting, Ambassador Saikal of Afghanistan for his statement and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Yamamoto, for presenting his report (S/2018/539).

Unfortunately, as the report indicates, security continues to remain Afghanistan's major challenge. Improving its security is one of the main requirements for long-term stability and socioeconomic development. In order to confront that challenge, the National Unity Government of Afghanistan needs the robust and sustained support of the international community. That is of the utmost importance if we are to establish lasting peace and stability in that part of the world.

As a neighbouring country, Iran has been steadfast in supporting and promoting Afghanistan's security and stability, as well as its socioeconomic development, which are all very closely interlinked. Our support for the Afghan National Unity Government is unrelenting. We welcome any progress on the path to an Afghan-owned and -led peace process leading to lasting and comprehensive peace. It is in that context that Iran welcomes and participates in the Kabul process for peace and security cooperation and similar processes to help bring peace and security to Afghanistan.

Iran welcomed the recent temporary ceasefire announced between the Government and the Taliban, as well as the Government's good faith efforts to ensure its continuation. We also welcome the recent positive developments in relations between our two neighbours Afghanistan and Pakistan. We hope they will continue and that the relations will be further strengthened.

Terrorism and extremism are not only a threat to Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries, but also to regional and international peace and security. Counter-terrorism efforts must be given the highest priority. In the same vein, supporting Afghanistan's counter-terrorism measures advances regional and international peace and security. In that regard, we believe that the growing threat of Da'esh and its affiliates in Afghanistan should not be underestimated.

As we approach the elections in Afghanistan and take into account the role that successful elections could play in strengthening the political institutions and national unity in the country, improved security conditions become more relevant and essential.

Iran also attaches great importance to promoting regional cooperation in support of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan. We welcome the continued work of the joint committees entrusted with formulating a comprehensive framework agreement for bilateral cooperation. We hope that will soon lead to the agreement's conclusion, ensuring sustained and increasing cooperation between the two countries. The ongoing efforts in the port of Chabahar will have a significant impact on promoting trade and economic cooperation with Afghanistan. Any attempt to disrupt that vital project will play into the hands of those who do not want peace and progress for the Afghan people. We need unconditional international support for such innovative projects.

We believe that special attention should be paid to combating the interlinked sources of insecurity and instability in Afghanistan, particularly the production of, and trade in, narcotic drugs as a major source of income for terrorists, extremists and illegal armed groups. Accordingly, the international community must support the relevant international and regional projects and activities, especially the tripartite initiatives by Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, to fight the menace of narcotics.

We continue to support the dedicated work of UNAMA and United Nations agencies in providing reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan. Sustained ownership and partnership with the Afghan Government are needed in order to utilize the best potential of UNAMA and the United Nations system to deliver the necessary services in priority areas, as requested by the national Government.

As always, I would like to conclude my statement by expressing Iran's solidarity with the fraternal people of Afghanistan and by reassuring them of our full support in their challenging endeavour to achieve peace and prosperity in their country.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this timely consideration of the situation in Afghanistan.

The focus of the international community on Afghanistan has been unremitting since the start of

this year. The Security Council visited Afghanistan in January. A ministerial debate on Afghanistan and regional connectivity was organized by Kazakhstan in the Security Council (see S/PV.8162). Several international and regional conferences have been held to address aspects of the issue. We therefore hope that this debate will continue to reflect the unceasing commitment of the international community to Afghanistan. We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mr. Yamamoto for sharing his insights, Mr. Fedotov for providing the perspective on drugs and crimes and Mr. Voronkov for emphasizing the counter-terrorism dimensions. We also express our sincere appreciation of Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal's articulation of the challenges with which Afghanistan is confronted.

Listening to the briefings, it is obvious that the events of hope that are being discerned need to transform into a process if the situation in Afghanistan is to take a turn for the better. Sadly, the markers of progress on fundamental concerns about the situation strike a sombre note, whether in terms of the suffering of the ordinary people of Afghanistan, the senseless orgy of heinous killings by terrorists or the displacement of a conflict-weary people. Those aspects have a sobering impact by bringing us in touch with the harsh realities that the millions of people of Afghanistan face on a day-to-day basis.

Despite the much-appreciated peace offer of the Afghan Government, the offensive by the Taliban has taken many lives. Such offensives cannot but be planned and launched without the existence of safe havens in the neighbourhood of Afghanistan. Those supporting the terrorists targeting Afghanistan have not been deterred. Notwithstanding the efforts of the international community, there are still those that provide sanctuaries to support the dark agendas of terrorist organizations, such as the Taliban, the Haqqani network, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Al-Qaida, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed.

The same safe havens that sheltered Mullah Omar also sheltered Osama Bin Laden. Lest we forget, the terrorism problem in Afghanistan is not a local one. We do not need a catastrophe again to remind us that Afghanistan requires strong and steady international support in the elimination of the scourge of terrorism, which is a threat to global peace and security. Mr. Fedotov's presentation of the Taliban's involvement in virtually all aspects of the opium trade suggest that it is not only a political or terrorism problem but also one of organized crime. The Security Council therefore needs to build on the reference in resolution 2405 (2018) to the linkages between extremism, terrorism, drug production and the illegal exploitation of the natural resources of Afghanistan. It is time for the Council to look at options to better utilize the range of tools available to it to deal with those transnational networks of drugs, terrorism and crime.

For its part, India is aware of the resilience of the friendly people of Afghanistan. On the basis of Afghanistan's desire for robust, reliable and year-round connectivity and to improve trade and investment relations with prominent markets in the region and beyond, India has tailored its support as a development partner of Afghanistan to meet such requirements. In recent months, there have been significant developments as far as connectivity is concerned. Chabahar port in Iran was inaugurated in December 2017. The Indian grant assistance of 170,000 tons of wheat supplies to Afghanistan recently transited through Chabahar, highlighting the benefits of improved connectivity. The India-Afghanistan air freight corridor, established last year, has gained momentum in the first year of its operation. There are now cargo flights between Kabul, Kandahar, New Delhi and Mumbai. Thus far, such flights have carried more than 2,000 tons of exports from Afghanistan to India worth more than tens of millions of dollars. Encouraged by that, we have plans to expand the air freight corridor network to various other cities in Afghanistan and India.

Looking at the football on the table and the importance that you, Mr. President, have placed on the power of sport, I believe it important to mention the role of sportspersons from Afghanistan. The Persian poet and Sufi mystic Rumi once said that where there was ruin, there was hope for treasure. That seems to have been the case with the sportspersons from Afghanistan. They have left behind the memories of a time when sport was explicitly banned by the Taliban in Afghanistan. The national team of Afghanistan is the new sensation on cricket pitches globally. A few months ago, Afghanistan qualified for the next Cricket World Cup. They made their first foray as a test cricket-playing nation earlier this month, ensuring their presence among the best cricket-playing countries in the world. While having made cricket grounds in India their home base, Afghan cricketers have flourished.

However, we look forward to the day when we, too, can play cricket with them on their soil.

We appreciate the efforts of our Central Asian friends in assisting Afghanistan in the most difficult times. The efforts of Uzbekistan in organizing the recent Tashkent conference on Afghanistan and the continuous tireless efforts of Kazakhstan in working on Afghanistan-related issues in the Security Council are indeed significant and crucial to our collective efforts in the region. We will work with all those in the region that also believe that the interests of the Afghans are paramount in bringing about a lasting solution to the security situation through an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process.

Such efforts and those of partners from beyond our region all contribute to the indomitable spirit with which the friendly Afghan people are building their country despite the difficulties that they face. The Council, too, must incessantly contribute to that noble cause.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium associates itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union.

At the outset, I would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto not only for his briefing but also for his tireless efforts towards lasting peace in Afghanistan.

In the most recent debate on Afghanistan in the Security Council (see S/PV.8199), Belgium welcomed and supported the historic peace offer made by President Ghani and his National Unity Government. That offer was supported by the countries of the region, as well as the international community, including at the Tashkent conference on 27 March. Despite the annual launch of the Taliban's spring offensive, the offer has found deep resonance across the country in a civic movement for peace and reconciliation. Another essential contribution to peace was made on 14 May with the agreement on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity between those two countries.

Belgium notes with satisfaction the announcement that parliamentary and district council elections will be held on 20 October. It is important that that date be kept. Belgium notes the significant efforts of the Government, as well as the courage of the population, to register for the elections. It is also essential that women have an opportunity to participate in the elections both as voters and as candidates. The process leading to the holding of elections must be inclusive, transparent and credible.

It is also very important to underscore that necessary reforms must continue in Afghanistan, as outlined in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/539). Belgium welcomes the fact that the effectiveness of the law to combat violence against women is being strengthened and encourages the Afghan Government to redouble its efforts in the fight against impunity. In that context, the implementation of the existing legal framework is key. The anti-harassment of women and children law, enacted on 31 December 2017, is a step forward in improving complaints procedures and clarifying what constitutes harassment in public spaces.

Since the beginning of the year, Belgium has been working alongside Afghanistan in the Human Rights Council. We welcome Afghanistan's accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, which is a strong sign of its commitment to human rights. I believe that we should underscore that fact as we mark the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. We welcome the offer of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to assist the Government in the practical operationalization of the commitments set out in the Protocol.

Belgium deplores the increase in the recruitment and use of children by parties to the conflict and supports the Secretary-General's call on all parties to put an immediate stop to such grave violations. They cannot go unpunished. We call on the Government to bring the perpetrators to justice and to assess how return and rehabilitation mechanisms can be strengthened.

Attacks on schools and medical centres continue. We thank UNAMA for the careful monitoring of those gross violations of international humanitarian law. Such attacks remind us that the efforts of all parties concerned to implement resolution 2286 (2016), on conflict and health care, must be intensified.

In conclusion, Belgium commends President Ghani and his Government on their unwavering commitment to peace despite myriad challenges. The ball is indeed in the Taliban's court.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Ibragimov (Uzbekistan): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's quarterly debate on the situation in Afghanistan. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Yamamoto, Under-Secretary-General Voronkov and the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Mr. Fedotov, for their informative briefings.

It is obvious that prospects for sustainable development in Central Asia are closely linked to the achievement of durable peace in Afghanistan. Therefore, Uzbekistan continues efforts aimed at contributing to the stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan and its social and economic development, in accordance with the agreements reached at the international conference on Afghanistan held in Tashkent on 27 March. The event was convened at the joint initiative of the leaders of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan and attended by high-ranking officials from 21 States and leading international organizations, such as the United Nations, the European Union, NATO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Representatives of the five permanent members of the Security Council, members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as well as Afghanistan's neighbours and key regional countries that are actively involved in rendering assistance in economic recovery of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan were present at the Tashkent forum. The Tashkent declaration was adopted at the end of conference. I would like to mention some of its highlights.

First, the declaration demonstrates a consolidated position at the regional and global levels on the need for an early launch of direct negotiations between the Government of Afghanistan and the Afghan Islamic Movement of Taliban without preliminary conditions.

Secondly, the declaration defines the obligations of the opposing parties in the peace process. In particular, the document includes an appeal to the Government in Kabul to guarantee the integration of the armed opposition into the political life of Afghanistan and recognize it as a legitimate political force. In turn, the Movement of Taliban must recognize its own responsibility for peace and stability in the country, renounce violence, cut ties with international terrorist groups and respect the equal rights of all Afghans, in accordance with the main provisions of the Constitution.

Thirdly, the importance of the full support of the Afghan Government in combating terrorism, drug production and trafficking, as well as in taking resolute steps against all forms and manifestations of terrorism without any differentiation, was underscored by all participants.

Fourthly, all countries showed their respect for the sovereignty of Afghanistan and adherence to non-interference in its internal affairs.

Fifthly, the declaration also includes a separate paragraph devoted to regional economic cooperation. In particular, all participants underlined that, by promoting economic ties with Kabul, the countries of the region make their own contribution to ensuring stability and sustainable development in Afghanistan.

Based on the declaration, Uzbekistan is taking its own steps. The President of Uzbekistan has proposed to develop and implement efforts at the intra-Afghan, regional and global levels by developing a comprehensive peace programme for Afghanistan. At the intra-Afghan level, it is necessary to ensure the early launch, without preliminary conditions, of direct dialogue between the central Government and the main forces of the armed opposition, first and foremost the Movement of Taliban. Uzbekistan is ready to provide a platform for direct talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban in its territory at any stage of their development. In that context, the Uzbek side has held a series of consultative meetings and negotiations with the Government of Afghanistan and representatives of the United States, China, Russia, member States of the International Contact Group, States of the Eurasian region, South Asia, the Middle East and the Near East.

At the same time, the Uzbek side established appropriate contacts and held working meetings with high-ranking representatives of the Taliban Movement, during which prospects for dialogue and interaction to establish long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan and its economic development were discussed so as to realize the consolidated position of the participants of the Tashkent conference. On that basis, Uzbekistan welcomes the mutual introduction of a ceasefire between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban Movement in connection with the celebration of Eid Al-Fitr. The Uzbek side also welcomes the announcement by the President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, of the extension of the ceasefire.

At the regional level, it is necessary to ensure that a firm regional consensus is reached, primarily with the support of key regional players, including Central Asian States. That is critically important given that solving a number of key issues pertaining to economic development and security and stability in Afghanistan to a large extent depends upon neighbouring countries and their goodwill, firm determination and readiness to actively facilitate national reconciliation and end violence in Afghanistan. The efforts of all neighbouring countries and partners should not substitute but, rather, complement each other. It is important to develop and implement concerted measures, approaches and practical mechanisms to solve the problem.

At the global level, it is important that leading world Powers and donor organizations provide political support to the peace process and financial assistance for the socioeconomic rehabilitation of Afghanistan. Uzbekistan is making its own contribution to the process by expanding trade and implementing various projects. As a result, in 2017 the volume of trade increased by 15 per cent to a total of approximately $600 million. In the near future we intend to increase that number several times over and bring it to $1.5 billion. Uzbekistan has also initiated a number of joint infrastructure projects, such as the new Mazar-e-Sharif-Herat railway project, a project to construct the new 500-kilowatt Surkhan-Puli-Khumri power transmission line and the training of qualified national personnel for Afghanistan. An educational centre for the training of Afghan citizens has been in operation since last January in the Uzbek border city of Termez. In order to expand cooperation in the field of education, the President of Uzbekistan has proposed to establish a special international fund for supporting education in Afghanistan. The main goal of the fund is to assist Afghans in training national staff in in-demand professions, while providing scholarships and grants to talented students and young scientists.

In Uzbekistan we strongly believe that ultimately peace on Afghan soil will open up new opportunities and bring real benefits to all States of the greater Eurasian continent. It will advance common security and stability and create favourable conditions for the construction of highways and railroads, the laying of pipelines and the development of regional and trans-regional trade, thereby contributing to ensuring peace and stability in this vast region. Uzbekistan remains committed to continuing close cooperation with all stakeholders to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I would like to thank the members of the Security Council and the Secretariat for their participation.

The meeting rose at 1.40 p.m.